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## TALKING OF JANE AUSTEN





# TALKING OF JANE AUSTEN

BY

SHEILA KAYE-SMITH

and

G. B. STERN



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# TALKING OF JANE AUSTEN

## CHAPTER I

### *Introducing Sheila Kaye-Smith to Jane Austen*

IF the fanatical lovers of Jane Austen are few, few also are her declared enemies. She rouses none of the impatience and antagonism that are stirred sometimes by the restless, violent movements of her successor, Charles Dickens, nor the occasional disgusts that repel certain readers of her predecessors, Henry Fielding and Tobias Smollett, nor even the boredom that yawns away many pages of her illustrious and personally admired contemporary, Sir Walter Scott. The majority of the reading public finds her, I think, no worse than uninteresting—which is not so bad as finding her dull. She describes a section of English life and a period of English time which make only a small appeal to-day, and the gentle malice of her manner is no compensation for the limitations of her matter.

To most of these readers she is the author of one book only—*Pride and Prejudice*—the book which most true Janeites (certainly the two who are writing here) would place at the bottom of her achievements. It is the only book of hers which seems to have in it the elements of a popular success—as demonstrated by its distorted yet profitable image on the stage and screen. Its slightly Cinderella-ish story, noble hero, and tint of farce have recommended it to many on whom the subtleties of *Emma* and the depths of *Persuasion* would be thrown away. I have found more than once that to recommend one of the other novels to an admirer of *Pride and Prejudice* leads only to disappointment. They demand for their enjoyment tastes and sympathies which the better-known book does not require—they are for Jane Austen's friends, not for her general acquaintance.

Yet for many years *Pride and Prejudice* was the only book of hers I had seen. I say "seen" advisedly—not "read"—for the handsome edition bound in green and gold and illustrated by Thompson, was only looked at occasionally. It belonged to my father and stood in a shelf with *To Right the Wrong* and *In the Footstep of the Great*, which I knew almost by heart. They belonged to the eighteenth century, which was to me then sense of a personal period of history, whereas *Pride and Prejudice* was sense of growing up.

when history in my estimation ceased to be history and became merely old-fashioned. Sometimes in moments of boredom I would turn the pages and look at the illustrations, which gave me a general impression of quaintness—a characteristic I still dislike but no longer expect to find in the pages of Jane Austen.

The artist must bear some of the blame for this mistake. Unless a character were notoriously middle-aged and unattractive the general run of faces was entirely without expression. So many quaintly old-fashioned tailors' and dressmakers' dummies strode and tripped, drank tea, rode on horseback, danced quadrilles, all quaintly dressed in cut-away coats and high-waisted frocks, with their hair falling in ringlets or rolling in quiffs, that it was difficult to imagine that here I had men and women very much more alive than the musty heroes and heroines of my Edna Lyall romances.

This idea of quaintness, associated with a high waist, persisted, I regret to say, till after I should have known better. For I remember that once when an invitation to a fancy-dress dance found me more than usually destitute of money and ideas I looked out an old white dress which had a highish waist, raised it still higher with a blue sash, stuck a wreath of forget-me-nots in my hair and called myself—imagine it!—Jane Austen. Evidently my mind still carried a simpering picture based on a merely ocular acquaintance with *Pride and Prejudice*, even though at that time her complete works in two volumes—the two volumes which are beside me now and from which I still read a nightly portion—must already have been in my possession.

I bought these round about 1905 or '06, out of my allowance of a shilling a week. As they cost eighteenpence each their purchase must have involved a three-weeks' saving. But I was used to such mortgages of my private fortune. What I cannot understand was why, having bought them at such a cost, I did not read them. I know quite well why I *bought* them; it was in a desperate zeal for self-improvement which characterised my adolescence. I had decided that I *ought* to read Jane Austen and therefore provided myself with the means of doing so.

I did not use those means is another question.

Actually the two volumes—beautifully printed on India paper and bound in limp blue leather, an incredible bargain for three shillings—

with a reinforced notion of quaintness. Each of them has a sepia, and each frontispiece is decidedly high-waisted.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park* and *Northanger* to be seen dancing a quadrille with Bingley, whose peculiar manner of such illustrations (what were they or cellophane?) ; in the second, *Sense and Sensi-*

bility, *Emma* and *Persuasion* are introduced by a picture of Marianne Dashwood sitting very coyly on a hill-side nursing her sprained ankle while obviously waiting to be picked up by Willoughby. On the whole, Jane's illustrators have not done her justice.

My tastes in those days were all for the robust. I was to write my first two novels on a diet of Borrow, Fielding, Richardson, the Newgate Calendar and Johnson's *Lives of the Highwaymen*. For many years I read and re-read Fielding, and wrote in 1909 a monograph on Richardson which involved a still deeper plunge into the literature of his times. If I sought a change from these authors I found it in the poetry of William Blake. How did I ever come to read and delight in a writer who is as remote in all save time from the poet of the *Songs of Innocence* and the *Prophetic Books* as she is from the creators of *Tom Jones* and *Clarissa Harlowe*?

The answer is that she helped me through a bad time, giving me the release of a new discovery when I was turning round and round in a squirrel cage of small personal alarms. My third novel, *Spell Land*, had been published and, unlike its two predecessors, had received no reviews in the first three weeks. No doubt this was chiefly because it had appeared rather late in the autumn and the reviewers' columns were crowded; but I took it into my head that I was being passed over and forgotten—set aside as a negligible writer—and managed to work myself into a pretty fierce anxiety-state about it. I wanted something to distract my mind—to read some book in which I should be able to forget my fears and cease to watch for the postman. But my classical favourites were too well known to be a real distraction, and modern novels from the library came too close to my own problem. I had these six novels of Jane Austen all unread, and for the first time I studied the print as distinct from the pictures.

“Emma Woodhouse—handsome, clever and rich—had lived twenty-one years in the world with very little to vex or distress her” . . . I was caught—caught by the very words that caught my present collaborator a few years later. There is a magic in that opening phrase of *Emma*— a magic that it would be hard to define and which probably charms only Jane-addicts, but with them is truly potent. I repeat that I was caught, and from that moment I read on till I had finished the book; and when I had finished it I read the others, and when I had finished them I read them over again, and when I had read them over again I read them over and over and over again and am still reading them.

At the start, *Emma* was my contemporary; now she might be my granddaughter, but I still have that warm, urgent sense of a personal relationship. It is curiously charming, this experience of growing up



with and round and past a character, entering into ever-changing and new relationships with it as one passes from girlhood's interest and envy to motherly affection and grandmotherly pride. Dear Emma! Dear snobbish, cocksure, deluded Emma!—"faultless in spite of all her faults". She is and will doubtless always be my favourite among the Jane Austen heroines, partly because she was the first I met (as she was, by a coincidence, for G. B. Stern), partly because of other reasons that I will give later, when I try to assess the novels as a whole and in relation to one another.

What impressed and attracted me most at their first reading was the modernity of their outlook and characterisation. Throughout my course of eighteenth-century novelists I had been consistently made aware of the differences between their age and my own. This, in the case of Fielding, Richardson and Smollett, may have been due to the fact that they were pioneers and sometimes a little awkward in the use of their new medium; but I was conscious of an even greater remoteness in Jane's contemporaries—Fanny Burney and Henry Mackenzie. There is a stiffness about *Evelina* and *The Man of Feeling* which will not allow one to forget that they were read in powdering closets by ladies in hooped petticoats. Even Maria Edgeworth sees life at an angle which makes the modern reader squint.

2) Jane Austen wrote in the language of her time, but so colloquially that its special literary characteristics and conventions do not intrude. She is occasionally long-winded and pompous, as are many modern writers; but because she is no stylist and never makes any attempt at fine writing, she has escaped the shadow of Dr. Johnson, which darkens so many pages of her contemporaries. Her novels are entirely devoid of those Johnsonese rotundities which would have dated them. She scrambles along in the colloquial English of her day, making those grammatical blunders which come so easily to us still—she always says "under the circumstances"—and using small colloquialisms and bits of slang—"chatty", "fagged"—which still crop up in the unstudied speech of 1943.

3) Her characters, too, are drawn life-size, whereas those of her great predecessors were generally a good deal larger. As for her less gifted contemporaries, so huge and unnatural had become the size of a heroine that Jane's faithful portrayals are in the nature of criticism and reaction. Certainly she painted Catherine Morland to show what a girl of seventeen usually is like as distinct from the enlargements of the circulating library. 7

It is this combination of nature and reality with a modern (or perhaps I should say, undated) outlook which creates the world which is in my

opinion the best of all literary worlds—only those of Cobbett and Trollope challenging it. Any author worth a bottle of ink can create some sort of a world, but it is not usually a world we should care to live in—it is a world we gaze at without entering, a world in a picture, a world in a looking-glass.

✓ In Jane Austen's world I can feel at home and be as much alive as in my own. The same laws function there that control me here. No licences are issued for distortion and improbability. I meet there people who are no mere characters in fiction, but sensible companions, and their thoughts and feelings are in close alliance with what I personally think and feel.

✓ To enter that world is to visit a congenial set of friends, and I still find that in their company I lose my own cares, much as I lost them on my first visit, thirty years ago. Jane Austen is the perfect novelist of escape—of legitimate escape, such as are our holidays. She does not transport one into fantasy but simply into another, less urgent, set of facts. She tells no fairy-tale which might send us back dazzled and reeling to our contacts with normal life, but diverts us from our preoccupations with another set of problems no less real than our own, but making no personal demands upon us. In fact it is her realism which provides the escape, for the fantastic and improbable only irritate certain minds and send them hurrying back unrefreshed to their own business.

To have the freedom of that world is to be a Janeite. A number of her readers never enter it, and these often declare that they cannot see her charm. It would be difficult to assess exactly what psychological conditions are necessary to make a Jane-addict, as distinct from a mere Jane-reader, and certainly the brotherhood embodies a number of people who are very unlike one another. G. B. Stern and I are in many ways very unlike each other, yet on this matter we shout with one voice—sometimes, I think (for variety's sake), a little too much in unison. We have of course this in common, that we are both writers, and I think a certain degree of literary appreciation is necessary for a real devotion to Jane Austen. Certainly many can have the appreciation without the devotion, but she is not for those who have it not. Unlike Dickens, she makes no mass appeal, partly for the reason that she has created no outstanding characters to capture the imagination even of those who have not read her books. Her methods are quietly realistic, she paints—as I have said—no more than life-size and her people are very much like the people we know and therefore (to the majority) unremarkable if not uninteresting. I think too that her snobbishness and occasional primness alienate a number of readers, also her exclusive preoccupation with the upper and middle classes.

✓ Certainly her world is not a perfect world, or even a better world than this. Its advantages are that it is a real, working, interesting world, very much like our own but with certain stimulating differences. G. B. Stern and I in the present book intend to do no more than explore and roughly map out that world. We shall ignore the world outside it—the world in which Jane wrote—except as in so far it is reflected in that other world she created. This is not a book about Jane Austen, nor even about her novels from a purely literary point of view, but about the people in the novels, their characters, their motives, their ways, their doings.

I do not think that it is likely to recommend her to those who have hitherto been blind to her attraction. We do not write to make converts, nor do we aspire to be entirely pleasing to confirmed admirers, who will doubtless find many a bone to pick with us before they have done with these pages. This book embodies a number of discussions and arguments, for when we are together we have a natural tendency to “talk Jane”—in other words to indulge in a conversation which is not so much literary as personal, to gossip about the people in the novels as we should gossip about the people in our lives. Our tongues have sharpened on the odiousness of Mrs. Elton, have argued the respective merits of Mary Crawford and Fanny Price, have abused Edmund, lingered affectionately over the peculiarities of darling Mr. Woodhouse, wondered what Emma wore at the Coles’ party, decided which of the six heroes we should choose ourselves to marry (we both decided on the same one), dug into the servant situation at Barton Cottage, and even tried to get a glimpse of those characters who never appear—such as that Mrs. Partridge so cruelly estimated by Emma, and Miss Andrews, beautiful as an angel but mysteriously displeasing to “the men”.

In fact this book is written almost entirely from selfish motives. We are not writing it mainly to delight our readers, but to delight ourselves—to give ourselves the pleasure of expressing ourselves at length on a subject which is completely absorbing to us both.

## CHAPTER II

### *Introducing G. B. Stern to Jane Austen*

IF you assemble a number of people to visit a house which pleases them all, they will pour over the threshold in excellent fellowship ; yet once inside, they may agree on nothing but the house itself, its façade and architecture, and the peculiar magic of the surrounding airs. Each will then discover that they love it for a different reason, express a preference for different rooms in the house, argue over the furnishings, the curtains and the lampshades, pictures and ornaments. We can be sure that the views from all the windows must be equally delightful however they may differ, but of little else. But abandon metaphor ; simply I wish to say that our common love of Jane Austen's writing is no assurance that we will agree over this book and that, this character and that. Even the happy endings, for Miss Austen allows only perfect concord in her last chapters, can yet provide theme for flushed faces and angry words. I, for instance, as you will discover in the chapter called "The Mansfield Park Quartette", would have felt far more comfortable if Fanny had been allowed to marry Henry Crawford, and Edmund, Mary Crawford, instead of the cousins tamely pairing off together, with the Crawfords left disconsolate ; but I am aware that this is only one opinion likely to cause furious partisans and opponents to spring up in as many rows as soldiers where Jason once sowed the dragon's teeth, to contest every preference I dare utter ; or to show as much compassionate astonishment at me, poor fool, as Marianne when her future-brother-in-law mildly avowed : "I like a fine prospect, but not on picturesque principles. I do not like crooked, twisted, blasted trees. I admire them much more if they are tall, straight, and flourishing." Marianne was very young and wildly intolerant, whereas Jane Austen in essence and where her heroines resemble herself, reveals such a clear and reasonable quality, that measured by its light an unreasonable woman instantly ceases to be charming. It is an especially English quality at its best ; we see it in Rosalind of Arden Forest, and in Elizabeth Bennet, whose high spirits have the bubbling freshness of spring, and again in little Alice, who can pass through the looking-glass and return again with her gaze as steady, her courage still high, and her logical good sense having resisted all confusion. Later on in her life, the wisdom of Jane Austen quietyens down, and lies before

us like a landscape accepting the mellow rays of autumn aware of winter beyond, or perhaps even, in *Persuasion*, already aware that for her will be no winter.

(Of all authors, I should say she was the most nourishing in the present turbulent aspect of the world with its horrors, its restrictions, its clash and discord.) Certainly it was easier in her day, though England was at war with Napoleon and threatened with invasion, to remain detached. It has been repeated so often that I need not enlarge on it now, how modern science has developed to the destruction of all individual peace ; how motor-cars, acroplanes, submarines, newspapers, telephones and (most of all) the wireless set have shattered what was the mellow normality of existence for the English countryside between 1775 and 1817. Nevertheless, I do not think this freedom from the seven noisy plagues of the twentieth century can rob Jane Austen of all credit for her special gifts of detachment, serenity, normality and good breeding, valuable aids for our temporary escape into a healing atmosphere ; her gaiety and wit, her irony and her mischievous appraisal of the ridiculous characters which will always parade every country and every period for our diversion, are special gifts which must have their foundation not merely in this century or that, but in a perception of truth and a scornful elimination of trumpery ; whatever is bogus in her world lies in a steady beam of illumination ; lies and dies in it. Bogus or phoney or fake ; strong modern terms we use to describe all that is detestable ; all that is in direct opposite to Jane Austen. She and the Giant Bogus have nothing to say to one another, except when, like Jack her prototype, she metaphorically runs him sharply through the middle and lets the pudding pour out.

So let us say we are visiting the house which is Jane Austen's, because we love the air, the view, the style, the outlook from the windows ; because it stands apart on a hill ; because the Georgian apartments with their exquisite proportions, their clear spaces, their white panelling and mellow parquet floors and high windows, are as beautiful as freedom, as reassuring as tolerance. We all love this house ; let us visit it together, and once inside we can quarrel to our hearts' content ; quarrels that will leave no bitterness, for they can be resolved neither into victory nor into defeat.

I feel as sincerely about Jane Austen's books as it is possible to feel about anything in literature ; nor do I suppose that anyone will be reading these chapters unless they are of the same company. . . . "It was a lover and his Lamb"—probably only lovers of Charles Lamb read E. V. Lucas on that subject. Thus we are not prowling round, my collaborator and myself, searching for converts ; only for those

insatiable legions who find the same mysterious pleasure as we do in talking Jane, discovering Jane, arguing Jane, quoting Jane, listing Jane, and for ever and ever marvelling at Jane and grateful for her legacy.

"Jane" is a short cut ; not, I hope you will believe, an impertinence. We cannot say every time : "the books of Jane Austen". Five words are clumsy where one will do, though there must be moments when I say Jane Austen in full because of her really slightly irritating habit of using her own Christian name for at least two of her heroines : Jane Fairfax and Jane Bennet. It is extraordinary she should have no self-consciousness in using her own name as though there were not enough others in the language. I should not have been in the least surprised to have found a family in her novels with the surname of Austen. She uses the Christian names of all her brothers : Edward, Henry, Frank, Charles. Only from Cassandra does she refuse such easy borrowing. I wonder, by the way, if I am wrong when I say there were plenty of other names ? Were there *not* plenty, at that period ? Is our modern abundant choice, of a recent date ? And yet the Elizabethans and the early Stuarts roamed more widely for their daughters ; I could make you up a fair bouquet of names recollected haphazard : Shakespeare's Silvia and Viola and Beatrice ; Lodge's Rosalind ; Campion's Laura ; Nick Breton's Phillida ; Lovelace's Althea. Diana and Helen are names of beauty at the disposal of poets and writers of all periods. Why, then, did choice apparently contract for a hundred years or so, to merely a few "good old-fashioned names", as we call them now ? Herrick's Julia and Sidney's Stella and Ben Jonson's Celia are not spoken of as "good old-fashioned names". Perhaps the decorum of nineteenth-century parents refused mythology and legend and the Classics as their chief source ; required names of more sober upholstery and home weaving.

All this is irrelevant, but there seems no reason to forbid ourselves a luxurious irrelevance if we are escaping from our present-day troubles and restrictions. Indeed, it would be tiresome immediately to impose new restrictions, even in the world of Jane Austen's books ; for remember that this is to be a book about Jane Austen's books, not about Jane Austen herself and her life and the manners of her times ; not, in fact, a biography, which demands a strict attention to facts. There have been biographies already, some good, some indifferent ; none of them as ample as we could desire. For reading Jane Austen, to those who love her, is like mounting with wings as eagles ; we cannot tire. But there is little justification in writing about her life unless research and scholarship, yes and luck too, should have revealed fresh facts, fresh

knowledge of her. We have no such precious loot ; therefore we have agreed that this volume shall concern itself only with *Pride and Prejudice*, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Northanger Abbey*, *Emma*, *Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion*, not including *Lady Susan*, *Love and Friendship*, *Sanditon* nor even *The Watsons*, that fragment from the store of Tantalus. . . . If ever one were to rail against untimely death—but let it alone. There is so little of death, in Jane.

When I arrived as far as this, I sat down to think on the matter, and to verify what had been perhaps a careless statement. Yet still I can think of no death of any importance within those novels ; none causing profound sorrow. "Within" eliminates the grief Anne Elliot must have felt over the death of her mother, which happened some time before the book begins. Death just slips into the picture again in *Persuasion*, with Captain Harville's sigh for the loss of his sister Fanny Harville, betrothed to Captain Benwick ; and again in the same volume, Mrs. Smith, Anne's former school-friend, is left destitute without her husband. In *Sense and Sensibility*, too, death opens the story where Mr. Henry Dashwood followed old Mr. Dashwood on the second page, and after only twelve months' enjoyment of the estate of Norland ; Mrs. Dashwood and her three daughters were, therefore, forced to remove themselves to Barton in the West of England ; while their successors at Norland, Mr. and Mrs. John Dashwood, settled down to play a comedy scene, solemnly considering what need not be done for his half-sisters, which is in many ways the most sardonic and the most delightful thing of its kind which the author has given us. (In *Pride and Prejudice*, her first novel, death is kept well beyond the frontiers and out of sight. As she travels on, it gradually becomes visible, though never important, till in *Persuasion*, the last book before her own quiet departing, we are allowed to feel that Anne still misses her mother and thinks of her with real emotion :

For a few moments her imagination and her heart were bewitched. The idea of becoming what her mother had been ; of having the precious name of " Lady Elliot " first revived in herself.

In the passing of Mrs. Tilney from a bilious fever, another death is mentioned and deliciously misinterpreted by Catherine Morland in her naïve search for a really thrilling Abbey murder in Mrs. Radcliffe style. Eleanor Tilney grieved for her mother, but that, too, happened some nine years before the book began. Dr. Grant's death must have been a great relief to Mrs. Grant's housekeeping accounts. And the death of Mr. Norris, though a cause of agony to Fanny, while she believed for a while that it would mean going from Mansfield Park

to be a solace to her Aunt Norris, meant to the widow a good reason for further interesting economies and sponging on others, rather than actual grief. Tom Bertram nearly died, and Louisa Musgrove, but only nearly. Emma's mother also died, when Emma was quite a child, but "poor Miss Taylor" provided a more than excellent substitute. After much pondering, I can only recall one death, actual and authentic, happening neither before the beginning nor after the end, but placed so as directly to affect the turn of events ; and that, it must be admitted in honesty, aroused no sad feelings at all, but the period-equivalent of "whoopee" when those concerned heard that

"the great Mrs. Churchill was no more. . . . It was felt as such things must be felt. Everybody had a degree of gravity and sorrow ; tenderness towards the departed, solicitude for the surviving friends ; and in a reasonable time, curiosity to know where she would be buried."

It is strange that where there is so much of death in all our lives, and in hers no exception, how Jane Austen should have so firmly decided to have none of it in her books except these few very minor instances ; and not only to have thus decided, but to have carried it through so naturally and successfully that in spite of it, and with six radiantly happy endings instead, we can yet think her novels true to life. Upon my word, it was not until it happened to strike me a few moments ago, that I noticed she had arrived at some truce with death, that he should let her write of all other things and never appear himself (a grim reflection that he appeared the sooner beyond and outside her stories). It is significant of Jane Austen magic, how one may read and re-read and go on re-reading her books, and still never come to the end of new discovery such as this. I have no idea how often I have read those six novels of hers, and I dare not set down a guess for fear you should think I am exaggerating prodigiously in order to produce an effect. I can only tell you how I first began ; lingering pleasantly on the disclosure, as one enjoys telling how one first met one's love, what he wore and what you wore, and why one remembers it was a Friday, and how at that moment one thought not to care for him at all—in that silly tie !). My first encounter, then, with Jane Austen might have been when I was about eight or nine. I cannot imagine how a particular set of four books bound alike in sober sage-green arrived upon our nursery shelves ; someone may have given them to my elder sister ; odd and unsuitable volumes belonging to a nurse or a governess did sometimes find their way among our favourite Mrs. Molesworths and Frances Hodgson Burnetts. The three volumes forced into arbitrary



sage-green acquaintance with *Mansfield Park*, were *Home Influence* and its sequel *A Mother's Recompense*—I forget by whom—and *In the Days of Bruce*, by Grace Aguilar ; *Mansfield Park* was then to me unquestionably the duller of the four.

The part of *Mansfield Park* which I did read as a child, enjoyed and re-read several times so that I still know it slightly better than the rest, was where they acted "Lovers' Vows", during Sir Thomas's absence in Antigua on business. I was myself for ever acting, writing plays, rehearsing them with my cousins ; forcing Mother or a governess or the maids to come in as audience ; or sometimes, when encouraged to do it in style, rehearsing beforehand for two or three weeks, and finally producing the result very much as the young Bertrams planned (but were frustrated by the premature return of Sir Thomas) in the billiard-room, where rows of smiling grown-ups were placed ; refreshments were laid in the dining-room, and—this is where we differed from the *Mansfield Park* arrangements,—our dressing-room was the drawing-room with the door opening on to the billiard-room stage ; whereas you will remember how Sir Thomas found the bookcase surprisingly removed from the door connecting his own room with the billiard-room, and "opening it, found himself on the stage of a theatre, and opposed to a ranting young man, who appeared likely to knock him down backwards". As he had no use whatever for rehearsals, or for Mr. Yates as Baron Wildenheim, or any further performances of "Lovers' Vows", he had promptly shut down the theatre and "set the carpenter to work in pulling down what had been so lately put up in the billiard-room, and given the scene-painter his dismissal. . . ."

Naturally, I sympathised passionately with his disappointed children ; supposing *my* father should suddenly intervene when expectation and excitement were within a day or two of fulfilment ?

In *Mansfield Park*, I could not quite follow their initial difficulty in finding a play to suit them all ; as a juvenile dramatist, my plays were found directly I began to write them ; nor was I sure why Fanny was so fussy on the score of impropriety : "Agatha and Amelia appeared to her in their different ways so totally improper for home representation ; the situation of one, and the language of the other, so unfit to be expressed by any woman of modesty, that she could hardly suppose her cousins could be aware of what they were engaging in." Where it seemed to me that they were afflicted with exactly the same troubles as my own, was over the difficulty of collecting everyone's concentration at rehearsals, and inducing them to learn their parts in time for the night itself. Though the scene of Sir Thomas's return is delightful for an adult reader, I shall feel all my life that I (little Gladys) have been done

out of assisting at the great night ; always I shall wonder whether the Mansfield Park theatricals would have been a success, and who had the most applause, and did Mr. Rushworth (in his blue costume and pink satin cloak) remember any of his two-and-forty speeches ?

So, a stage-struck child, I became amazingly familiar with a brief portion of *Mansfield Park* ; read the rest once, did not care for it, and forgot it for a matter of twenty years or so.

I think that my next unsuccessful attempt to read Jane Austen was when I was eighteen, an ardent student at the Academy of Dramatic Art. We were given scenes out of *Pride and Prejudice* to play ; and, expecting a leading part, I was allotted Kitty Bennet, unimportant and fretful. So my wounded pride set up a slight prejudice against that lovely story which was to give me so much happiness in ten years' time. I doubt if I really read it, but merely glanced at the chapters thrust upon me. *Pippa Passes* was its rival just then, for I was given a leading part in it, and one of my speeches (though I had not two-and-forty) ran on for two and a half pages without a break . . . Mr. Browning having no talent for brisk Noel Coward dialogue.

I may have been about twenty-five or twenty-six when Sheila Kaye-Smith and I went down together to stay for a week at a charming village called Bradenham, not far from where Lord Beaconsfield had lived and died. Thrift Cottage stood on the edge of the green, with a view across it to the lovely old church. The gorse was out on Naphill Common, not far away, and so was the washing, brilliant white, spread on the bright yellow.

But we cannot have been meaning to stay a whole week ! Surely we would never have brought only one library book each, to carry us over seven days and evenings in rainy England ? My highbrow choice had been *The Brook Kerith* by George Moore. Nowadays, caring less for opinion, I might easily have packed *The Brook Kerith*, but in company with a little light relief : an Agatha Christie, say, or a White-oaks or a Lucia. What made it the more hazardous was that I had never read George Moore before, and *The Brook Kerith* was, I think, his first experiment of leaving out all punctuation and inverted commas ; you can imagine how I felt, struggling along through the first chapters. Then Sheila came to the rescue, and but for Sheila (and but for George Moore) I might never have become the lover of Jane I am now. Sheila, I found to my astonishment, whatever other book or books accompanied her on far travels to Bradenham or elsewhere, never moved without a volume of Jane Austen. It happened to be *Emma* at this time, and she offered to lend it to me while she read her equivalent of *The Brook Kerith*. Better than nothing, I thought, little knowing. And began :

—Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence, and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her.

Have I ever thanked Sheila enough? If not, I do so now.

Yet, though I surrendered wholly and without reservation to the spell of Jane Austen, I still do not seem to have thrown myself instantly on all her books, in tears because they were so few. It cannot have been long, however; perhaps, though dates and events of the last war have become a little shadowy, it was in the same summer, the summer of 1917, that I stayed with Mother and Father in Ilfracombe and found myself in the midst of a nervous breakdown which produced the inconvenient symptoms of frequent and irrational crying and a refusal of my legs to carry me. The effort to overcome both these manifestations of some serious maladjustment with life made me worse instead of better. "Pray exert yourself," the characters in Jane Austen frequently adjure one another. Wise advice, no doubt, in a period when young ladies were only too apt to turn their faces to the wall and go into a decline; but it happened that to exert myself was the opposite of what I really needed. To exert oneself when it can lead to some active good is not the same as constant exertion on a negative route. When you have been living against the grain for some time, you need to relax till body and spirit are strong enough to turn life in an opposite direction. And presently one little doctor was clever enough not to order exertion, but complete rest: "Go to bed for three weeks," he said. "Would you like that? Get your meals brought up, if you can, and read plenty of nice cheerful books. Forget about things. Have your bed pulled up to the window, and keep it wide open. No visitors. Never mind about your legs. You see, it'll be all right."

It was indeed all right.

My bedroom was on the second floor, overlooking the little harbour of Ilfracombe. The weather was glorious. The bed was drawn up to the huge open window, and I was able to watch the ships and the fishing-boats in and out of the harbour; I was able to relax, to enjoy the busy, vivid life on the quay, and what went on outside the little painted houses and waterside inn. Except for my father and the pleasant Devonshire maid who brought up my meals (not lentils, even though we were in the third year of the last war) I saw hardly anyone. As for the nice cheerful books recommended by the doctor, to help me forget about things—

Yes, of course. I am asking no riddles, and I expected you to guess. Providentially kept away until then by all the slipshod, fatuous reasons which I have already told you, I now had *Sense and Sensibility*, *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* to read for the very first time ; *Pride and Prejudice* and *Mansfield Park* almost for the first time. You can forget a war when you are reading Jane Austen for the first time, the second time, the hundredth time ; you can forget strain and sorrow and perplexity, injustice and fear. It is the loveliest of all worlds, and I have enjoyed remembering how I stepped into it. Now there is a war again, and we may not escape long or forget for long, and the bed by the open window overlooking a blue sunlit sea is rarely possible, but still—

. . . “I hope everybody had a pleasant evening,” said Mr. Woodhouse, in his quiet way. “I had. Once I felt the fire rather too much ; but then I moved back my chair a little and it did not disturb me.”

### CHAPTER III

## "All the New Poems and States of the Nation"

SHEILA KAYE-SMITH

JANE AUSTEN was born in 1775 and died in 1817. Between these dates the following events took place :

*The American War of Independence and the loss of the American colonies.*

*The French Revolution and the Reign of Terror.*

*The Rise and Fall of Napoleon Buonaparte.*

Only the most distant references to any of these can be found in the novels, and their exclusion is obviously deliberate, for they made a pretty heavy impact on the country at large, even in those days of slow communications and scanty newspapers. The constant wars created conditions of scarcity and unemployment that must have intruded even into remote country parsonages, and the threat of invasion over the author's home in Southern England can have lain only a shade more lightly than it was to lie after another hundred years.

Moreover, Jane Austen herself was no flighty ignoramus, and though her interests were almost exclusively feminine and in the society of her day politics were left mainly, and we suspect indifferently, to the male, she must have been well aware of all that was going on, if only through the family's naval associations. Her decision, therefore, to ignore it all must have been for some good reason, due no doubt to one of her greatest gifts of grace and sense—a knowledge of the limits of her own powers.

Just as she had refused, at an indirectly royal invitation, to write a novel on the fortunes of a German Royal Family, so she declined to allow her pages to be darkened by more than occasional shadows of French wars. The wars by land and sea which thundered over most of her adult life exist only in a smart militia regiment sent to flutter female hearts in *Pride and Prejudice*, and in the talk of those charming naval officers living unwillingly peaceful lives ashore in *Persuasion*. Sir Thomas Bertram, it is true, has the alarm of a French privateer on his voyage home from Antigua. But anything less total than any war in Jane Austen's novels it would be difficult to imagine—not one amounts to more than decimal nought-one per cent.

✓ The French Revolution has even less notice from her, though it left its mark on English thought and society in much the same way as the Russian Revolution of 1917—producing its sympathetic coteries of

parlour pinks as well as its regiment of Blimps in opposition. The Austen family had, moreover, a personal link with this event which must have made it of more than usual interest to Jane. In 1797 her brother married his cousin, Eliza de Feuillide, who had lost her husband in the Terror. Miss Emma Austen-Leigh in her captivating *Jane Austen and Steventon* quotes a family tradition that, after the Peace of Amiens, the Henry Austens went to France, hoping to regain some of the de Feuillide property, and narrowly escaped death when hostilities suddenly flared up again. They fled by post-chaise to the coast, with Henry disguised as an invalid at the back of the carriage, and probably owed their lives to the perfect French spoken by his wife. Such an adventure must have played its part both in Jane's experience and in her imagination, but it finds no place in her books.

In fact the only reference to the French Revolution which I can discover is so remote and frivolous as to be hardly recognizable. "O my dear Mr. Bennet" . . . cries his spouse on her return from the ball, and proceeds to plague him with a list of Mr. Bingley's partners—"Then the two third he danced with Miss King and the two fourth with Maria Lucas and the two fifth with Jane again and the two sixth with Lizzie, and the *Boulanger*—" Here Mr. Bennet breaks in and prevents our ever knowing whom Mr. Bingley chose to link arms with and weave in and out of the other dancers, much as the Paris bakers were said to have linked arms and danced through the crowd in a famous orgy of the torch-lit streets. The *Boulanger* lost its popularity only with the general passing of the country dance from English ballrooms invaded from Germany by the polka and the waltz. It remains Jane Austen's solitary reference to an earthquake the tremors of which are with us yet.

It would not perhaps be reasonable to expect even such a remote✓ allusion to the American War of Independence, for she was only a small child when the Colonies were lost. "A strange business this in America, Doctor Grant . . ." I once used to think that Tom Bertram's desperate effort to retrieve his *gaffe* with the doctor by engaging him in a discussion on politics had some connection with the American War; but I now realise that he was about thirty years too late. Jane's novels are all more or less contemporaneous with her actual life while writing them, and *Mansfield Park*, written after the gap of silence which separates the first three novels from the last three, would not refer to events earlier than the year 1800. Indeed, what this "strange business in America" was I have never been able to find out.

There is nothing incredible in the remoteness of the Jane Austen✓ characters from the public distresses of the world in which they lived.  
It was possible in those days for normal life to go on as usual without :

interference from contemporary upheavals. The army and navy were limited, specialized professions which even in time of war absorbed no more than a fraction of the nation's man-power, and Napoleon's armies, reluctant to cross the Channel in their invasion barges, had not then an alternative route by air. There is no escapist evasion in the tranquil lives of Highbury, Mansfield, Northanger or Bath. Jane has not been avoiding reality in her population of unarmed young men and unalarmed young women. In excluding rumours of war and revolution she has only been legitimately exercising her artistic privilege and duty of selection.

For it is plain that any much greater intrusion of public events into the novels would have damaged their quality. It would have overstrained their delicate fabric, disturbed their graceful proportions—like a coat of arms embroidered into a needlework picture of birds and flowers. No sacrifice of truth is involved, indeed truth, rather, is served by such a sense of proportion in history. For history has been driven out of all proportion by over-insistence on its more catastrophic aspects. As Catherine Morland rightly protests—"The quarrels of popes and kings, with wars and pestilences on every page; the men all so good-for-nothing and hardly any women at all—it is very tiresome." Jane Austen ignores the more tiresome aspects of history, but her books are full of its more charming implications, for in them we see men and women of a different age come alive with all their equipment of human interests, human moods, human fashions and ideas and movements, literary, artistic, and cultural. We are shown their food, their clothes, their furniture, their fads—their superficial differences from us and fundamental kinship. None of this would have stood out so clearly against a background of wars and pestilences.

I see Jane Austen leaning over the bridge between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, watching the stream of history flow by. Her eyes are on the stream itself rather than on what it carries—neither Buonaparte's ill-fated craft nor the noisy pirate barge of Danton and Robespierre has power to distract her from the flow which is history itself—the river as distinct from the traffic on it.

A powerful current moves the slow waters beneath. From her bridge between the centuries she watches their aspect change before the sweep of the Romantic Revival. Here the simile collapses, for she is much more than a detached observer of this current. She herself is carried along by it.

—When she was born the classical or Augustan age had already passed. Formality in art, manners and ideas had given place to something much more free and spontaneous. In poetry the stiffness of the heroic couplet had yielded to more romantic and irregular verse-forms, and Pope and

Addison had been dethroned as popular idols in favour of Cowper and Scott. Shakespeare, on the other hand, had come back into his own after years of eclipse as a barbarian. In art, formal representation of dignified and pleasing objects had given place to the new standards of the "picturesque"—to a reaction in favour of ruins, tatters and storms. Ruined abbeys, blasted trees, lowering skies and ragged bands of gipsies were the subjects of those popular prints turned out in their hundreds by new processes of engraving. As in art, so in architecture. The stiff, solid, useful shapes of Georgian country houses were being set upon by a gang of "improvers"—of whom Repton was the chief—and spiked and frizzled into Gothic gables. The Gothic became the rage as a symbol of ruin and romance, even to the extent of faked ruins and ornamental hermitages ("her ladyship," says Mrs. Bennet, erroneously, "will be pleased with the hermitage").

Jane Austen's personal attitude to all this seems mainly one of detachment. She chose and she criticized.<sup>1</sup> She appears to identify herself, on the one hand, with Fanny Price's opposition to the "improvements" of Sotherton, on the other with that same Fanny's rather cavilling criticism of the mansion's eminently utilitarian chapel—"I am disappointed," she said in a low voice to Edmund. "This is not my idea of a chapel. There is nothing awful here, nothing melancholy, nothing grand. Here are no arches, no inscriptions, no banners—no banners, cousin, to be "blown by the night wind of heaven"; no sign that a "Scottish monarch sleeps below"."

This is written considerably later than the presentation of Marianne Dashwood's ardent pursuit of all the most romantic ideas and notions of her time—ranging from worship of "the picturesque" in art and literature to the conviction of the impossibility of any "second attachment" in the field of love. Marianne, in her youthful enthusiasm, warmth and "sensibility", is one of Jane's most endearing portraits, but she is pictured with great detachment. Indeed one feels that her author's sympathies are all for her opposite number of "sense". I see Jane's own personal opinion, too, behind Edward's statement to the aghast and pitying Marianne that he does not like "ruined, tattered cottages" and that he takes "more pleasure in a snug farmhouse than in a watch-tower" and prefers "a troop of tidy, happy villagers" to "the finest banditti on earth".

On the other hand, we know that Jane Austen shared Marianne's admiration of Cowper, Thomson and Scott, and in Elinor's addiction to drawing, she shows evident approval of a female accomplishment which the Romantic Movement had made fashionable. It is probable that Elinor's drawings were not original, like Emma Woodhouse's



efforts some twenty years later, but copies of some "print of merit", in which no doubt "ruined, tattered cottages" and "old twisted trees" were featured as freely as in her sister's imagination.

✓ In fact in *Sense and Sensibility*, as in the other novels, (we see Jane Austen moving sympathetically with the main cultural ideas of her period, but always reserving to herself the right to stand back and criticize. She does this most notably in the field of the novel itself. The Romantic Revival had more effect on the novel than on almost any other form of art; in fact it brought it out of the experimental stage and established it as a department of literature. But the results were not all improvements, and Jane evidently had but little admiration for some of them. Indeed one of her earliest novels, *Northanger Abbey*, was written, like Fielding's *Joseph Andrews*, as an exposure of another type of fiction; though in his case the parody is limited to an actual book—Richardson's *Pamela*—whereas hers is the parody of a school.)

The novel was now no longer a new and unusual literary form. The circulating libraries which had sprung up in every town were introducing it to growing masses of readers. By some it was still regarded with suspicion—as frivolous, if not actually demoralising—and Jane on at least one occasion feels urged to defend it against those who would decry "performances which have only genius, wit and taste to recommend them", while Catherine Morland had "always thought that young men despised novels amazingly". But the general public (or rather, the very small portion of it that could read) was both eager and uncritical in its attitude. The demand for novels came to exceed the supply, and standards fell owing to mass production by literary hacks—a circulating library Gothic comparable to the churchwarden Gothic of a later age and another art.

Jane Austen, we know, admired the novels of Sir Walter Scott, which were as genuinely a production of the Romantic Revival as *The Castle of Otranto* and the novels of Mrs. Radcliffe. But whereas he relied for his Gothic effects on a return to history, they achieved theirs mainly by mystery and sensation. Mrs. Radcliffe's novels are indeed the ancestors of the thriller) and it would not be difficult to trace *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, *Doctor Thorndyke's Cases* or even the elucidations of Lord Peter Wimsey, back to *The Children of the Forest* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho*.

(Both Walpole and Mrs. Radcliffe were capable and responsible writers within their limits. It was only in the hands of their imitators that their style became ridiculous. *Northanger Abbey* is not so much a parody as a sober check-up on the imbecilities of the hack novelist. Jane Austen takes all the stock-in-trade of the popular novel of her day

—she takes a “heroine”, provides her with a family, a confidante, a traducer, an oppressor, a defender, a ruined abbey and a Horrid Mystery, and shows them all in the sober light of an English winter day, which gives them a very different appearance from that which they made in the sultry glow of the circulating library. Yet so consummately is it done, so sure is she as a story-teller, that the novel is alive and complete in itself and—like the similar *Joseph Andrews*—has no need to be compared with its sources of inspiration.

(Jane herself was certainly no romantic, and as a writer she stands right away from the twin schools of the Picturesque Revival—the historical and the sensational—from the one which she admired as much as from the one which she did not. Her place is in the traditional, realistic school of English fiction, which found other contemporary exponents in Henry Mackenzie and Fanny Burney. These writers are the direct descendants of Defoe, Fielding and Smollett, and the direct ancestors of Dickens, Thackeray and Arnold Bennett. But they are influenced by the Romantic Movement, even though it does not change their course. While avoiding the fantastic and sensational and confining themselves to much the same sort of subject as their predecessors—that is, ordinary English life in their own day—they nevertheless treat that subject in a rather different manner.)

Just as a lovely Queen Anne façade sometimes has nothing more behind it than a scramble of low roofs and inferior rooms, so the imposing formality of the Augustan age had often disguised a brutality of thought and living which a later age of more external freedom and more internal “sensibility” turned from in disgust. Jane herself, in her famous defence of the novel in *Northanger Abbey*, from which I have already quoted, refers with an obvious shudder to the *Spectator* itself, as a publication bound to “disgust a young person of taste . . . language, too, frequently so coarse as to give no very favourable idea of the age that could endure it”.

If we take a dip into *Peregrine Pickle* and then into, say, *The Man of Feeling* we will realize how utterly tastes and tendencies had changed in a period of little more than half a century. (The “sensibility” of the Romantic Movement had influenced a much wider circle than those who had surrendered to its more Gothic aspects.) It had not, however, yet affected the actual structure of society, and the revolt of “persons of taste” from the brutalities which had not only been tolerated but enjoyed by their grandfathers expressed itself mainly in a gesture of avoidance. Jane Austen herself is certainly determined to avoid the squalors of contemporary life, and she sometimes carries this fastidiousness to the point of primness.) In *Mansfield Park*, for instance, the

elopement of Crawford and Maria might have been more convincing, at least in its early stages, if she had not so firmly insisted that "other pens" (of whom, I wonder, what she thinking?) should "dwell on guilt and misery".

(Certainly she is more reticent on "such odious subjects" than almost any other writer of her period.) Lydia's news in *Pride and Prejudice* that "a private had been flogged" is almost the only reference I can find to the more brutal aspects of eighteenth-century life—which may be one reason why Jane Austen's novels appear so modern in comparison with those of Smollett, for instance, or Fielding, which are definitely dated by their violence. Who would guess while listening to the humane and enlightened talk of Captain Wentworth and Captain Harville and the two Crofts in *Persuasion* that the crews of their ships were sometimes partly, sometimes mainly, recruited by the cudgels of the Press Gang? Who would gather from the harmless sporting activities at Uppercross or Netherfield that poachers caught on those estates were probably transported for life? Who, seeing Mr. Woodhouse's anxiety over the imagined fatigues of his horses, or watching Mrs. Norris alight in all the panoply of conscious virtue to walk up hill and spare "those noble animals", would realise that at that period cats were skinned alive under the impression that it improved their pelts and that legislation to prevent this atrocity was laughed to scorn in Parliament?—or that cock-fighting and prize-fighting were probably the most popular spectator-sports in "dear, airy, cheerful, happy-looking Highbury"?

Jane Austen lived at a time when, in spite of the widespread infliction of capital punishment, even on children, crime was rife (with felons tried and untried herded together in common wards, awaiting the reforms of Elizabeth Fry), and the police force (also awaiting reforms) was worse than inadequate. Yet the only two "criminal" incidents I can recall in all six novels are confined to *Emma*—the robbery of Mrs. Weston's poultry-roosts and the famous episode of Harriet and the gipsies, both of which, except (I hope) for the nitwitted reactions of Harriet and Miss Bickerton, might have happened to-day. Indeed our present efficient police-system and low rate of crime might have inspired Tilney's rebuke of Catherine in *Northanger Abbey*—"Dear Miss Morland, consider the dreadful nature of the suspicions you have entertained. What have you been judging from? Remember that we are English, that we are Christians. . . . Does our education prepare us for such atrocities? Do our laws connive at them? Could they be perpetrated without being known, in a country like this, where social and literary intercourse are on such a footing?"

Certainly Catherine's idea of a secret Mrs. Tilney "languishing out her days" in some hidden part of the Abbey was a bit tough even for those times, but most of us would be inclined to suspect the existence of more cruel husbands and injured wives, more dishonest servants and unhappy children, more physical punishments (there are none) and physical discomforts, more overturned coaches (no character has any mishap while travelling), more heavy drinking (no one is ever the worse for drink, except perhaps Mr. Elton, who was, however, only suspected by Emma of having "drunk too much of Mr. Weston's good wine"), more fighting than a distant reference to two duels (one of which took place while the other did not), more sickness, more violent death (no one dies even peacefully except off-stage) than we find in the novels of Jane Austen.)

I imagine that she was determined to ignore what is called "the darker side of life", whether as exposed in French wars or English laws, and the fact that she was able to do so without in any way detracting from the lifelikeness of the world she created is one reason why that world makes such an ideal holiday resort. She was far too conscientious an artist to compromise with truth, and we may be sure that the facts she ignored could be ignored, and almost certainly were ignored by the kind of people she writes about—people of culture and humanity living among surviving barbarisms and therefore tending either to reform them or to ignore them. Her characters are none of them reformers, so it is not unnatural that they should shut their eyes to many of the evils of their times, the reform of which was indeed left mainly to a later generation. Moreover, as a literary artist she realised—though perhaps unconsciously—that people must always be more important and more interesting than conditions or events.)

✓ (She herself has compared her art to that of a miniature painter, and certainly in a miniature there is no room for anything more than the subject with perhaps an indication of the immediate background. Personally I should compare her rather to an etcher, for an etching bites sharply into its medium, and acid is a necessary part of the artist's equipment. This acid, salty characteristic is an essential ingredient of the novels and makes up for the absence of deeper, more universal qualities. It is the necessary antinomy of their "pleasantness", and it delights her admirers while it doubtless accounts for her lack of general popularity. Her novels are not caviare, but they taste rather like it.)

No true disciple could bear to lose or even to soften this sharp taste, which, like salt in butter, preserves their pleasant substance from deterioration. Certainly without it we should notice the absence of those stronger flavours which enrich the novels of Dickens and Tolstoy. It

provides the weight, the balance (to change the simile) which other authors achieve in war, politics, controversy, crime, psychological conflict or intellectual brilliance. Take it away—as has sometimes been done on the stage or on the screen—and the whole performance deteriorates into sentimentality and quaintness. Jane Austen, we know, envied the “candour”—word that has so completely reversed its meaning—of her elder sister. It is fortunate for us that in this case she was never able to imitate what she admired.

## CHAPTER IV

### *On a Certain Enchanting Quality*

G. B. STERN

I HAVE been hauled over the coals (a phrase which would have been unknown to Miss Austen) by one of our modern writers for my too frequent use of the word "chump", which, he asserts, is merely my old-fashioned attempt to keep up with contemporary slang. I have tried to remain calm during his passionate indictment; firstly, because I think he should be encouraged to take an interest in the proper use of language; and secondly, because for once I am absolutely certain of being in the right: "Chump" must be a word for general and not merely topical use, for the good reason that it cannot be supplanted. For what should I call Mr. Woodhouse, Harriet Smith, Mrs. Dashwood, Lady Bertram, Charlotte Palmer, Mrs. Allen, if not chump?—qualifying it perhaps by an adjective selected for each individual specimen: a delicious chump, a hopeless chump, a good-natured chump. Having asked my accuser to select an alternative so that I could mend my ways, he was, of course, unable to supply one. I did my best to help him, and we tried variously: "idiot", "ass", "nitwit", "moron", "simpleton", "fathead", "goose", and the North-Country "gorm", but not one of them was quite right. "Gorm" came nearest, perhaps, but it is too regional, and, moreover, contains a slightly lumpish quality, wholly out of place in connection with what I mean by chump. There is nothing lumpish about Harriet Smith or Mrs. Allen. Chumphood involves certain endearing ingredients; nearly always when you call a person a chump (as when you call a dog Hervey) you are ready to love them. Chumps are usually a little vague, ingenuous, deeply earnest in their statements and deeply honest. Chumps do no harm. Perhaps the best example in all fiction is Dora Spenlow, David Copperfield's child-wife; she is indeed Princess Chump. We can and do laugh at a chump in trouble, but authors would do well to remember that there is something far more poignant about the death of a chump than the death of any of their nobler, stronger characters. I cried with David when Dora was dying upstairs—until Agnes came in to break the news with her "solemn hand upraised towards Heaven"!

P. G. Wodehouse made a notable contribution to the merry order of chumps in fiction, with his Bertie Wooster. But—here is the subtle

difference—although Thackeray's Amelia was a fool, and so was Major Dobbin, they do not qualify for my collection, lacking just that—there you are, I have searched in my mind and I cannot express it otherwise ; lacking just that chumpery, that starry prattling idiocy, that chubbiness of outlook, that willingness to be guided, that complete lack of self-analysis and self-consciousness. Let us, therefore, accept the word thankfully ; and recognising that Jane Austen had a beautifully light hand with chumps (as we say of pastry-makers), amuse ourselves by collecting them from her books to put into a gallery apart.

First and foremost, Mr. Woodhouse. The rest, I think, are all ladies, for Mr. Collins is no chump ; he is a pompous, complacent fool, but, as we have already said, this is different ; over Mr. Robert Ferrars, in *Sense and Sensibility*, I have hesitated ; perhaps where he chooses a toothpick ?—perhaps where he tells of his triumph in advising a friend how to build a cottage ? Yet he is too fundamentally malicious and conceited. I am already sure that chumpery, under analysis, must be essentially unworldly, with a note of childlike simplicity. We may hesitate again over Mr. Elton, tempted to include him when he is exclaiming over Emma's portrait of Harriet. But he too, when he is not being fatuous, is malicious, unkind, and a snob. However, if we pursue that same passage from *Emma*, it brings us straight to my dearest chump of all :

"It is very pretty," said Mr. Woodhouse. . . . "The only thing I do not thoroughly like is that she seems to be sitting out of doors, with only a little shawl over her shoulders ; and it makes one think she must catch cold."

"But, my dear papa, it is supposed to be summer—a warm day in summer. Look at the tree."

"But it is never safe to sit out of doors, my dear."

Mr. Woodhouse, then, besides being our only male on the list, is also our prize chump. Wherever we may open *Emma* and he is mentioned, he provides us with perfect lines for the chump album. Over the marriage of "poor Miss Taylor that was" ; over Harriet's riddle-book ; when he quarrels with his son-in-law, Mr. John Knightley, about "the sad consequences of your going to Southend, it does not bear talking of" and quotes Mr. Perry ; over his concern for his daughters, his coachman and horses, and even his visitors' perilous sorties in bad weather :

"Ah, Mr. Knightley, why do not you stay at home like poor Mr. Elton ?"

Finally his admonitions to Emma when she goes to dine with the Coles :

. . . "You will not like staying late. You will get very tired when

tea is over. . . . There will be a great many people talking at once, you will not like the noise."

"But my dear sir," cried Mr. Weston, "if Emma comes away early it will be breaking up the party."

"And no great harm if it does," said Mr. Woodhouse. "The sooner every party breaks up, the better." . . .

Most pleasing to those who love him (and you cannot surely, be irritated by Mr. Woodhouse?) is his hospitality ruined by his passionate care for his friends' digestions :

. . . "Serle understands boiling an egg better than anybody. I would not recommend an egg boiled by anybody else. But you need not be afraid : they are very small, you see. . . . I do not advise the custard."

(*Why* does he not advise the custard ? We shall never know !)

Nor can we be satisfied without quoting a portion of that delightful scene where the impetuous young Frank Churchill, backed up by Emma, tries to persuade Mr. Woodhouse that it would be a good plan to give a little ball at the Crown Inn.

. . . "But I do not understand how the room at the Crown can be safer for you than your father's house."

"From the very circumstance of its being larger, sir. We shall have no occasion to open the windows at all—not once the whole evening ; and it is that dreadful habit of opening the windows, letting in cold air upon heated bodies, which (as you well know, sir) does the mischief."

"Open the windows ! But surely, Mr. Churchill, nobody would think of opening the windows at Randalls. Nobody could be so imprudent. I never heard of such a thing. Dancing with open windows ! I am sure neither your father nor Mrs. Weston (poor Miss Taylor that was) would suffer it."

"Ah ! sir ; but a thoughtless young person will sometimes step behind a window-curtain, and throw up a sash without its being suspected. I have often known it done myself."

"Have you, indeed, sir ? Bless me ! I never could have supposed it. But I live out of the world, and am often astonished at what I hear. . . . If I could be sure of the rooms being thoroughly aired. But is Mrs. Stokes to be trusted ? I doubt it. I do not know her, even by sight."

Mr. Woodhouse, as we have just seen, places a touching emphasis on the advantage of knowing anybody by sight. The unknown is to him positively dangerous. I am willing to admit, even with all my



partiality for the dear old gentleman, that he was a little over-tenderly coddled by one of the most affectionate and dutiful daughters in all literature. I would rather have Emma than Iphigenia ; rather, again, Emma than Jephthah's daughter or Antigone. Emma can be too saucy, too impatient, too downright with every other person she meets, but in relation to Mr. Woodhouse she has no faults. Even when her heart was broken by Mr. Knightley's supposed infatuation for Harriet, even then her father must come first with her : " The weather affected Mr. Woodhouse and he could only be kept tolerably comfortable by almost ceaseless attention on his daughter's side, and by exertions which had never cost her half so much before." In return, he gives her his complete, his uncritical fondness and love. What Emma does is perfect, always. He relies upon her judgment, her hospitality, her presence and company to a touching extent ; in fact, had she not such an abundance of vitality, we might be almost angry with him for sapping it ; but Emma seems to suffer no loss ; and her burden is lightened by her father's universal popularity. Chumps have, indeed, this saving grace ; it may be maddening to live with them (though Mr. Knightley consents to do so when it is a question of marrying Emma, and Mr. Elton rather daringly observes " rather he than I "), but we rarely find them forced to live alone ; their sweetness, their simplicity and their generous disposition is bound to attract a companion. Emma would not leave her father for the world ; and we shall see presently that Isabella and Harriet, chumps collected from the same novel, which is rich in the species, have both been courted and won by sensible men, Mr. John Knightley and Mr. Martin. It is, in fact, rather curious how sensible men in the Austen novels, these two added to Sir Thomas Bertram, Mr. Bennet and Mr. Allen, appear deliberately to have chosen a wife from the kingdom of chumpery ; though of Mr. Bennet's choice, on second thoughts, I am not so sure ; there can be no doubt but that he has chosen a fool, but Mrs. Bennet does not qualify for a place in the sun among the chumps ✓ of my especial tenderness. She is not a nice woman at all. She has no generosity of mind ; her ignorance is not innocence ; she is greedy, snobbish and vulgar. There is not the least tinge of vulgarity in Mr. Woodhouse, Harriet Smith, Isabella Knightley, Mrs. Dashwood, Mrs. Allen, Lady Bertram. We must have kindness, and because of their kindness we can endure to live with chumps ; though it may be more agreeable to visit them, enjoy their company, and depart when we will to the sensible companionship in our own homes. I fear that Mr. Allen and Sir Thomas must have been attracted by beauty alone.

Yet in Harriet Smith the lure is not so much her beauty as her artlessness : " Strength of understanding must not be expected." My happiest

moment with Harriet was when I first heard (I choose the verb intentionally) her solemn reply to Emma's prophecies on Mr. Martin in later age :

... "He will be a completely gross, vulgar farmer, totally inattentive to appearances, and thinking of nothing but profit and loss."

"Will he, indeed? that will be very bad."

Harriet is, I am inclined to think, the dearest of all female chumps; her never-failing surrender to Emma's influence, to Emma's confident (and altogether mistaken) outlook on life and society, her admiration of everything that Emma does, against all comers :

"Well, I always shall think that you play quite as well as she does, or that if there is any difference nobody would ever find it out."

For the full flavour of Harriet's talent for pure chumpery we have to recall a whole scene, the scene in Mrs. Ford's shop at Highbury. It will be familiar to you as it is to me and to all lovers of *Emma*; nevertheless, I dare say that fragments of the exact phrasing may be forgotten, with its perfect lead up to a perfect conclusion :

"It is not worth while, Harriet, to give Mrs. Ford the trouble of two parcels."

"No more it is."

"No trouble in the world, ma'am," said the obliging Mrs. Ford.

"Oh, but indeed I would much rather have it only in one. Then, if you please, you shall send it all to Mrs. Goddard's. I do not know. —No; I think, Miss Woodhouse, I may just as well have it sent to Hartfield, and take it home with me to-night? What do you advise?"

"That you do not give another second to the subject.—To Hartfield, if you please, Mrs. Ford."

"Ay, that will be much best," said Harriet, quite satisfied; "I should not at all like to have it sent to Mrs. Goddard's."

That "quite satisfied" could only have come from a master of the minds of men and women.

I do not know the letters of Jane Austen herself at all well, but a casual remark written to Cassandra must strike us afresh when we dwell on any scene of Harriet in company: "I find these little parties very pleasant"—and how much rich content, deeper than pleasure, has resulted to tens of thousands, simply because Jane Austen found these little parties very pleasant.

*Emma* is a happy hunting-ground for chumps; not only Mr. Woodhouse and Harriet, but Isabella Knightley. Being Mr. Woodhouse's daughter, inheriting much of his sweetness, nervousness and hypochondria, it is hardly surprising that she has also inherited some of that

idiot quality which so mysteriously fascinates me and which is the subject of this chapter. One moment of the two together will be enough to make us love her and at the same time to sympathise with her devoted husband in his moments of dry exasperation :

They had not been long seated and composed when Mr. Woodhouse, with a melancholy shake of the head and a sigh, called his daughter's attention to the sad change at Hartfield since she had been there last.

"Ah, my dear," said he—"poor Miss Taylor. It is a grievous business."

... "It is a sad change, indeed ; but I hope she is pretty well, sir?"

"Pretty well, my dear, I hope—pretty well. I do not know but that the place agrees with her tolerably."

Mr. John Knightley here asked Emma quietly whether there were any doubts of the air of Randalls.

But it is time we had a change from *Emma*, and explored other Austen territory. Three more chumps immediately present themselves for my catalogue : Lady Bertram, Mrs. Dashwood, Mrs. Allen. I have already mentioned that two of them appear to have succeeded in fixing, and not only in fixing but in holding, the loyal affection of sensible, well-informed husbands ; probably Mrs. Dashwood's husband was the same, though we hear little about him.

A general survey of Lady Bertram leaves us with a most amiable estimate of her character ; but when I come to a small-scale map, as it were, I cannot be so sure. For I have failed to discover in her one single ✓ moment where she rouses herself from placid lethargy to act for the happiness or salvation of others. If asked point-blank at the gates of heaven : what have you done to deserve a pass ? she must have been at a loss for any instance of such deserving, except her supreme thoughtfulness in sending her maid, Chapman, to dress Fanny's hair on the night of the ball, after Fanny had already done it herself and was ready to descend. Lady Bertram, we must face it, was a little weak in the understanding ; she exists for our diversion alone. She appeals to Sir Thomas for everything. "I will ask Sir Thomas . . . whether I can do without her," over Fanny's outing ; and "Sir Thomas, which should I prefer ?" when it came to a question of whist or speculation : "A very odd game. I do not know what it is all about. I am never to see my cards ; and Mr. Crawford does all the rest."

She is charmingly unsuspecting :

"I am glad you gave him [William] something considerable," said Lady Bertram, "for I gave him only £10."

“Indeed !” cried Mrs. Norris, reddening. “Upon my word, he must have gone off with his pockets well lined, and at no expense for his journey to London either !”

“Reddening” stands as perhaps the briefest and most perfect device ever achieved by single word, for letting us know that Mrs. Norris had given William very much less herself and had been throwing her weight about. Did Lady Bertram ever see through her sister Mrs. Norris? At one glorious moment, I wondered whether behind that padding of sloth and selfishness might lie hidden one of those shrewd and slightly disconcerting instincts that could never quite cease to function?

“I *must* live within my income or I shall be miserable ; and I own it would give me great satisfaction to be able to do rather more, to lay by a little at the end of the year.”

“*I dare say you will. You always do, don't you ?*”

—Or was this sheer stupidity? And again over the argument as to Fanny's headache and the aromatic vinegar :

Said Lady Bertram to Mrs. Norris : “She has had it *ever since she came back from your house the second time.*”

“What !” cried Edmund ; “has she been walking as well as cutting roses ; walking across the hot park to your house, and doing it twice, ma'am ? No wonder her head aches.”

Mrs. Norris was talking to Julia, and did not hear.

“And did not hear” compares with “reddening”. Triumph of technique . . . but was Lady Bertram innocent as well as indolent, when she let fall “the second time”, to get her sister into trouble?

Fortunately Lady Bertram need not be dismissed as altogether without human capacity for suffering or comfort. When Tom was ill, Fanny longed to be with her aunt, loving her for the negative virtue of quite simply never having been unkind, by her placid trustful dependence ; in comparison with Aunt Norris, she had really, during Fanny's sojourn at Mansfield, endeared herself to her niece. Suddenly and by one paragraph of sincerity, the woman is made real to us :

By one of the suffering party within, they were expected with such impatience as she had never known before. Fanny had scarcely passed the solemn-looking servants, when Lady Bertram came from the drawing-room to meet her ; came with no indolent step ; and falling on her neck, said, “Dear Fanny ! now I shall be comfortable.”

There is no end of learning more about Lady Bertram as we re-read and turn the pages forwards and backwards ; it is like spending an afternoon of discovery among the trunks put away for years in the attic.

She felt all the injuries of beauty in Mrs. Grant's being so well settled in life without being handsome.

"Somebody had whispered something to her ; she had forgot to ask Sir Thomas what it could be."

"As soon as I am a little more at leisure, I mean to look in at their rehearsals, too."

This, a remark without any significance when spoken by anybody else, becomes terrific from Lady Bertram, seated all day long among the cushions in a corner of the sofa with Pug beside her and Fanny to disentangle her work. For what is the exact nature of her misconception ? From what bustle of duty does she suppose she must first be released before she is a little more at leisure ? Here is Jane Austen sly and illuminating, both together ; we know now, for ever, that Lady Bertram believes herself to be at it hammer and tongs all the time.

And remembering the portion of *Mansfield Park* where Lady Bertram listened while Shakespeare was read aloud to her, conjecture starts afresh : Not *does* she listen to Shakespeare (because we know she does), but *can* she listen to Shakespeare ? Let us see if Jane Austen tells us ?

"Fanny has been reading to me. . . . She often reads to me out of those books ; and she was in the middle of a very fine speech of that man's—what's his name, Fanny ?—when we heard your footsteps." . . .

We can say good-bye to Lady Bertram, moderately inattentive to Cardinal Wolsey's finest speech read aloud by Henry Crawford. Anyhow she knew it was a play ; she says so ; we must rest content with that. "'It was really like being at a play,' said she. 'I wish Sir Thomas had been here.'"

✓ Mrs. Dashwood is a more intelligent specimen of the chump variety ; indeed, I would have disqualified her, except for certain idiocies and amiable self-delusions connected with her own talents as an economist and amateur architect which give out the authentic ring of true coin, so to speak, when thrown upon the table. I delight in hearing her plans to improve the cottage from her savings during the next year :

. . . "I shall see how much I am beforehand with the world in the spring, and we will plan our improvements accordingly."

Spiritually, she will always be beforehand in the spring, but, I am afraid, never financially.

Mrs. Dashwood had an independent spirit. It "overcame the wish of society for her children ; and she was resolute in declining to visit any family beyond the distance of a walk". She was unselfish, too, and wildly romantic ; her foolish indulgence of Marianne can only be for-

given by reminding ourselves of her real capacity for affection and the gentle dignity of her manners. She would, indeed, hardly amuse us at all from the chump angle but for her incurable optimism. I was about to state that optimists, of the fellowship of Mr. Micawber, were always funny, and pessimists never ; but just in time I remembered Mrs. Gummidge ; and the despondent jockey as played by Alfred Lester in *The Arcadians* ("I've gotter motter : Always merry and bright"). From a logical point of view, optimists should make us sad, not merry ; we should look on them as those who hang round a church door to look at the bridal couple as they pass : "pore young things", with a shake of the head and a dab of the handkerchief, "doomed to disillusion". Yet Mrs. Dashwood possesses all the unquenchable resilience of the race of optimists, so perhaps we need not pity her, after all. "My partiality does not blind me," she says of her future son-in-law, "he certainly is not so handsome as Willoughby ; but, at the same time, there is something much more pleasing in his countenance. There was always a something, if you remember, in Willoughby's eyes at times, which I did not like."

Elinor could *not* remember.

Elinor is her mother's opposite number ; it is essential that every chump should have someone near at hand who can see them for what they are, and sometimes put in a dry comment. Failing anyone else, the author will perform that office for us herself. Dickens or David are alternate showman for Mr. Micawber. I keep on referring to Mr. Micawber as though, indeed, I were writing on the characters of Dickens instead of Jane Austen, but Mrs. Dashwood recalls that exuberant gentleman.

Yes, she is, quite unquestionably, and whatever her faults, a woman of charm, and I am surprised that we are given no hint that she marries again ; she is, after all, hardly forty at the start of *Sense and Sensibility*. Can it be possible that Miss Austen, while laughing at Marianne for her sweeping judgments about declining years and infirmity for those who have passed the age of thirty-five, yet felt herself that there need be no question of supplying a second husband for Mrs. Dashwood ?—a pretty woman whose abundant liveliness and delicacy of mind endear her to all who enjoy her warm, unpretentious hospitality. Certainly, from the text, this notion can never have occurred to Jane Austen, or we should have seen Mrs. Dashwood beset by admirers, and *Sense and Sensibility* would have been a different story altogether.

When we pass on to Mrs. Allen, Catherine Morland's patron and chaperon, we are, on the contrary, surprised that she should even have captured one husband, and would certainly never expect that miracle

to happen twice if Mr. Allen suddenly passed away. Mrs. Allen has no charm to engage any man ; no mind ; no magnetism ; no wit ; no tact ; no information ; no solid worth ; no sparkle of wickedness nor steady halo of goodness. Her apathy amounts to crime ; her listless indifference to actual cruelty. Her one constant mental promenade is through arcades and mazes of thoughts about gowns, pelisses and bonnets, her own or anyone else's ; " the prices in shops and the durability of muslins " ; the only interest, in fact, which proved her alive at all. Like Lady Bertram, she is utterly indolent and dozy, with not even the recommendation of one moment of humanity or sorrow. And she is as repetitive as a cuckoo.

" What a delightful place Bath is," said Mrs. Allen . . . " and how pleasant it would be if we had any acquaintance here."

This sentiment had been uttered so often in vain, that Mrs. Allen had no particular reason to hope it would be followed with more advantage now ; . . . and the unwearied diligence with which she had every day wished for the same thing was at length to have its reward.

The " reward " was the discovery of Mrs. Thorpe sitting beside her, a former schoolfellow.

Their joy on this meeting was very great, as well it might, since they had been contented to know nothing of each other for the last fifteen years.

[Miss Austen is certainly a little satirical !]

As a chaperon to Catherine, Mrs. Allen was a total failure, though of course she remained complacently unaware of it. Catherine first learnt how feeble her support must ever be, when she hoped for her protection to avoid going out for a drive alone with John Thorpe :

Catherine's silent appeal to her friend, meanwhile, was entirely thrown away ; for Mrs. Allen, not being at all in the habit of conveying any expression herself by a look, was not aware of its being ever intended by anybody else ; and Catherine . . . was therefore obliged to speak plainer. " Well, ma'am, what do you say to it ? Can you spare me for an hour or two ? Shall I go ? "

" Do just as you please, my dear," replied Mrs. Allen, with the most placid indifference.

Mr. Allen, however, on a later occasion, is more helpful and has distincter notions of propriety :

" Mrs. Allen, are not you sure of my way of thinking ?

" Yes, very much so, indeed. Open carriages are nasty things.

A clean gown is not five minutes' wear in them. You are splashed getting in and out ; and the wind takes your hair and your bonnet in every direction. I hate an open carriage myself."

" . . . Do you not think it has an odd appearance if young ladies are frequently driven about in them by young men, to whom they are not even related ? "

" Yes, my dear, a very odd appearance indeed. I cannot bear to see it."

" Dear madam," cried Catherine, " then why did not you tell me so before ? I am sure if I had known it to be improper I would not have gone with Mr. Thorpe at all ; but I always hoped you would tell me, if you thought I was doing wrong."

" And so I should, my dear. . . . But one must not be over particular. Young people *will* be young people, as your good mother says herself. You know I wanted you, when we first came, not to buy that sprigged muslin, but you would. Young people do not like to be always thwarted."

And there we have an enlightening display of the chump in Mrs. Allen ; her full reaction to life, to her husband's opinions, the bewilderment of her young charge, her awe-inspiring lack of helpfulness to everyone within her sphere.

One more corollary on Mrs. Allen, this time from the lips of the commentator, the compère, the Greek chorus, who, as I said earlier in this chapter, is indispensable. This time it is Henry Tilney in conversation with Catherine on the advantages of life at Bath over life in the country :

" Here you are in pursuit only of amusement all day long."

" And so I am at home : only I do not find so much of it. I walk about here, and so I do there ; but here I see a variety of people in every street, and there I can only go and call on Mrs. Allen."

Mr. Tilney was very much amused. " Only go and call on Mrs. Allen ! " he repeated. " What a picture of intellectual poverty ! "

She is the apotheosis of the negative, and the complete proof of that extraordinary phenomenon which makes genius able to present us with a bore in whose actual company we would not willingly endure five minutes were she suddenly introduced to us outside the frame of fiction, and yet hang with ecstasy on every word she utters, longing for more, when created by Jane Austen. We could say the same of Miss Bates. How maddening, how horrifying would be the prospect of an evening spent in listening to Miss Bates's too abundant flow of conversation, were this fate ever really in store for us. How emphatically we should



declare that Miss Bates was the world's worst bore and as such to be avoided at all costs. Yet to read a monologue by Miss Bates—ah, that *is* wholly different ; that is like eating the best, the most luscious ice-cream (if you happen to be fond of ice-cream). In real life, it would be difficult to choose which we should be at most pains to avoid, Miss Bates who talks too much, or Mrs. Allen who talks so little.

We could give many more examples of characters in fiction whom we could never tolerate in the flesh, though they most strangely enchant us as a creation of literary genius ; and yet say, if questioned, that one chief reason for loving them is not only that they entertain us, but that they are so *real*. It may be that mingled with our pleasure in their society is a happy consciousness of our own freedom : *we* can escape when we will ; this has not actually happened to *us*, that we must sit beside Lady Bertram on the couch, walk beside Mrs. Allen in the Assembly rooms, listen to Miss Bates reading aloud the latest letter from her niece Jane Fairfax. No device, therefore, could be more excellent than that these characters should certainly exist for us, yet safely enclosed between the covers of a book. ✓ Their immortality is our security ; if they lived, they would not be immortal, merely a mortal nuisance. We can be fairly sure that someone has paid the penalty for our diversion and nourishment ; the true selective instinct can function through weariness and irritation ; interpose, as it were, a soft padding of chamois leather between suffering and the bristles that cause such suffering. Jane Austen must have endured many hours of the vulgarity of a Mrs. Elton, the rattle of Miss Bates's conversation, before her alchemy got to work upon them.

For this, no less than for everything else, we give her our deep, our understanding gratitude.

## CHAPTER V

### *"As Careless on Such Subjects as Most People"*

SHEILA KAYE-SMITH

ONE of my unsatisfied desires is to know more about how Jane Austen's women were dressed—I mean, from the actual pages of her novels, not just from contemporary fashion-plates. I long to know what Emma wore when she went to dinner at the Coles', or in her own house when she gave that dinner-party for Mrs. Elton. Surely a beautiful and becoming dress had something to do with Anne Elliot's effect on Captain Wentworth at the concert in the Octagon Room. What was she wearing?—was it silk or muslin?—and how had she done her hair?

Jane Austen refuses to gratify me in this important matter. She is highly reticent as to her heroines' clothes, and about her two most charming young women, Emma Woodhouse and Anne Elliot, vouchsafes no information at all. She describes their persons—Emma's blooming, healthful face and lovely figure ("such a pretty height and size") and Anne's more delicate attractions—but she has nothing to say about what they wore. They do not themselves appear to take any interest in the matter. Jane herself, as we know from her letters, spent a great deal of time planning dresses and caps, but "how she should be dressed" is a question that absorbs only her two most unselflike heroines—Fanny Price and Catherine Morland, both anxious to appear well, one from natural diffidence, the other from youthful ignorance as to the effect of pretty clothes upon the male.

They are the only two characters we ever see fully clothed—Fanny in the white dress with glossy spots that Sir Thomas gave her for Maria's wedding, and which was apparently her only evening gown, as it had to do duty both at a family dinner at Mansfield parsonage and at her own coming-out ball at the Park—Catherine in the "sprigged muslin robe with blue trimmings—plain black shoes" which she wore at the Lower Rooms and was afterwards, according to true heroine custom and Henry Tilney's teasing, to immortalise in her Journal.

There is more about clothes in *Northanger Abbey* than in any of the other novels. This may be because we are told of Mrs. Allen that "dress was her passion" and that "she had a most harmless delight in being fine". We are not, however, given any account of what she actually wore, though we know—again with the help of Henry Tilney

—that one of her gowns was of muslin that had “cost but nine shillings a yard”.

Muslin was the great fashionable novelty of Jane Austen's youth. The conquest of India had introduced it from the East, together with light silks from China, to supersede the heavier fabrics that had hitherto been worn. Until then women's clothes had been made of stiff and substantial materials—cloths, velvets, brocades, heavy Lyons silks that “stood up of themselves”, stout woollens and grosgrains. The importation of Indian muslins and China silks brought about a revolution in clothes, which, like the poetry of the age, became much more flowing and free. The lighter and cheaper materials enabled a great number and variety of dresses to be worn—gowns were no longer imperishable and handed on from mother to daughter. Moreover, muslin would wash (even though sometimes, as Henry Tilney predicted for Catherine Morland's, it would fray), with the result that women could for the first time indulge freely in white gowns.

These soon came to be the symbol of elegance and refinement. “Put on a white gown,” says Mrs. Allen to Catherine when she goes to call on Miss Tilney. “Miss Tilney always wears white.” While in *Mansfield Park* Edmund tells Fanny, afraid of being too fine, that “a woman can never be too fine while she is all in white”, and Mrs. Norris hears with satisfaction that the housekeeper at Sotherton had turned away two housemaids for aping their betters by wearing white gowns.

Muslin, though not to be had in a wide range of colours, still managed to achieve variety. “La !” says the eldest Miss Steele to Elinor Dashwood walking in the park, “if you have not got your spotted muslin on !—I wonder you was not afraid of its being torn.” While the author herself, in her classic passage on the indifference of the male to any aspect of women's clothes beyond “neatness and fashion”, enumerates not only the spotted and the tamboured muslins between which her heroine was hesitating, but also “the sprigged, the mull or the jacksonet”. As a popular material it seems to have held the field for a considerable time, though other fabrics were still worn, for I cannot think that Isabella Thorpe was in muslin when she wrote to Catherine, “I wear nothing but purple now. I know I look hideous in it, but no matter ; it is your dear brother's favourite colour.” She also speaks of Miss Andrews “looking so heavenly” in her puce-coloured sarcenet, and satin was highly fashionable for great occasions such as weddings—hence Emma's (“very little white satin, very few lace veils”) appearing “a most pitiful business” to Mrs. Elton.

Mrs. Elton is another of the few characters who take an interest in clothes. She was evidently a “dresser”. Emma, searching for some

good she can truthfully say of her, calls her "very pleasant and very elegantly dressed", while she replies to Harriet's "I think her beautiful, quite beautiful" with "very nicely dressed indeed; a remarkably elegant gown". Later on we see her "as elegant as lace and pearls could make her" attending the dinner given in her honour at Hartfield; and that same evening she asks Jane Fairfax how she likes her gown—"Handsome, I think, but I do not know whether it is not overtrimmed. I have the greatest dislike to the idea of being overtrimmed—quite a horror of finery." Certainly the plainer, softer materials of the current fashion gave more scope for trimmings than the richly patterned brocades and silks which had made trimming unnecessary. In spite of her dread of being overtrimmed Mrs. Elton goes on to say: "I have some notion of putting such a trimming as this to my white and silver poplin. Do you think it will look well?"

Mrs. Elton and Mrs. Allen—both stupid women, one malevolently ✓ and the other benevolently so—are the only characters in all the novels who show any real preoccupation with dress; for Catherine and Fanny are only reacting with natural diffidence to special occasions. This might make one think that, in spite of her own interest, as displayed in her letters, Jane Austen regarded such a preoccupation as a sign of feminine weakness and vanity. She has, however, no mercy for its opposite extreme. Lydia Bennet—certainly *not* one of her favourite characters—particularly displays her thoughtless folly in neglect and contempt of her clothes. When she elopes with Wickham she has left behind her "a great slit in my worked muslin gown", and earlier in the book, when she buys a bonnet, she casually states, "'I do not think it is very pretty; but I thought I might as well buy it as not' . . . And when her sister abused it as ugly, she added with perfect unconcern, 'Oh, but there were two or three much uglier in the shop!'"

The bonnet had just begun to supersede the hat, which had been fashionable for almost two centuries, and throughout the novels bonnets are mentioned frequently. Mrs. Elton, still a leader of fashion in Highbury, threatens Mr. Knightley with her "large bonnet" at his strawberry picnic, while Mary Crawford proclaims "a closed bonnet" as the correct wear for a girl who is not yet "out". Hats, however, are still worn. Elizabeth Bennet is rather uncharacteristically occupied in trimming a hat in the first chapter of *Pride and Prejudice*, while Lucy Steele, in token of forgiveness of her sister Anne for having "popped out" the story of her engagement to Edward Ferrars, "made me this bow to my hat and put in the feather last night".

Heads were covered by night as well as by day. From her seat at the back of the Upper Rooms, Catherine Morland could see no more

than "the high feathers of some of the ladies", while Isabella Thorpe despises Anne Mitchell for having "tried to put on a turban like mine, as I wore it the week before at the concert . . . It happened to become my odd face, I believe". Even without caps and turbans, hairdressing was important, and some of the fashions, especially during the period of the later novels, must have bordered on the ridiculous—at least to the masculine eye. Frank Churchill, of course, was not sincere when he said to Emma—"really Miss Fairfax has done her hair in so odd a way—so very odd a way—that I cannot keep my eyes from her. I never saw anything so *outré*!" But evidently William Price had had similar reactions before he remarked, "with his hand stretched towards Fanny's head, 'Do you know, I begin to like that queer fashion already, though when I first heard of such things being done in England I could not believe it; and when Mrs. Brown and the other women at the Commissioners, at Gibraltar, appeared in the same trim, I thought they were mad.'"

Though the extravagances of the powdering age—which had not obtained in more than a small section of society—were over, hairdressing was still elaborate, varying between the rather difficult simplicities of the "Grecian style" and built-up effects of combs and curls and braids which must have been nearly as hard to achieve as the stiffened white towers of an earlier generation. No doubt it was unusual that a fair lady should dress her own hair for a great occasion. "How has Wright done my hair?" asks Mrs. Elton of Jane Fairfax at the Westons' ball—where Miss Bates with more commendable pride asks: "How do you like Jane's hair? She did it all herself"—evidently proclaiming a feat. Even Elizabeth Bennet—on the whole a simply bred heroine—had a maid to dress her hair, for Mrs. Bennet, running into her daughters' room, to announce the early arrival of Mr. Bingley, cries out—"Here, Sarah, come to Miss Bennet this moment and help her on with her gown. Never mind Miss Lizzy's hair."

Certainly Jane Austen gives us plenty of information, as well as many indirect hints, as to the fashions of her day. But I still want to know how Emma and Anne were dressed.

On the matter of food, she is neither more nor less enlightening. Her main preoccupation was with meals rather than what was eaten at them; and meals achieve in her pages an importance denied to clothes, for then, as now, they were social nuclei and the measure of the day. Meals, too, were changing in her time—moving away with the rest of life from the formal stolidity of an earlier age; half a century nearer to the casual habits of to-day. Already the day of well-to-do people had four acknowledged interruptions for eating.

Until about fifty years earlier dinner had been the only substantial meal—and very substantial it was, indeed—with breakfast a mere *frustum* (though it had become something more important than the “livery” or bedroom snack taken from the livery-cupboard overnight) and supper little more than a soothing of the weary stomach before sleep. But in Jane Austen’s time breakfast had become a good solid meal in itself—as witness “the cold pork bones and mustard” on William Price’s plate the day after the ball, and “the broken egg-shells” on Mr. Crawford’s. We are told, too, that breakfast was a favourite meal with Mrs. Jennings, over which she was disposed to linger, though no hint of a menu is supplied. Tea and coffee were not commonly drunk at that time of day, and beer, which for long had been a breakfast drink, was going out of fashion. In *Northanger Abbey* we are told that General Tilney drank cocoa at breakfast-time, and probably cocoa or chocolate was the usual drink at most tables.

(The breakfast hour was very much later then than it is now—generally about ten o’clock)—and a great deal of the day’s life had passed before it. In *Sense and Sensibility* Marianne talks of rising for study at six o’clock, though we are not told that she ever actually did so. In the same novel Edward meets Elinor at what was obviously the family’s normal hour of assembly and then goes out to see to his stabling in the village before sitting down to breakfast. (No one in those days had trains to catch or offices and factories to reach at an early hour, so there was no need to eat a meal except at leisure. The increasing lateness of the dinner-hour, too, required a correspondingly late breakfast if the pangs of hunger were to be avoided.)

Dinner was now well on the way of its slow move from midday to midnight, and in Jane Austen’s time had reached somewhere around five, though old-fashioned people, like Mr. Woodhouse, still had it earlier. He suggests that Mr. and Mrs. Cole, instead of indulging in dangerous “dinner-visits” should “take their tea with us; take us in their afternoon walk, which they might well do, as our hours are so reasonable and yet get home without being out in the damp of the evening”—which, as tea then immediately followed dinner, points to an earlier hour than most people’s. Certainly Mr. and Mrs. Cole dined later than Mr. Woodhouse, for when she goes to their dinner-party, Emma’s “last pleasing duty before she left the house, was to pay her respects to” her father and the two old friends she had invited in to keep him company “as they sat together after dinner”. They were evidently at their dessert, for she was able, “while her father was fondly noticing the beauty of her dress, to make the two ladies all the amends in her power by helping them to large slices of cake and full glasses of

wine, for whatever unwilling self-denial his care of their constitutions might have obliged them to practise during the meal”.

Mr. Woodhouse's care of his own digestion was equalled only by his care for that of others ; none the less he liked “ to have the cloth laid (for supper) because it had been the fashion of his youth ”. (When the normal dinner-time was early, supper had been a regular meal everywhere, but the increasing lateness of the hour had pushed it close to bed-time and reduced it in most houses to something very like the modern drinks-tray) (though Mrs. Philips offered a “ bit of hot supper ” as a climax to her “ nice, comfortable, noisy game of lottery tickets ”). We see Catherine Morland drinking “ her warm wine and water ” before going to bed, and Fanny wondering what she will do when Edmund is no longer there “ to mix the wine and water for her ”—the continental habit of mixing the two seems to have been generally practised in England then—and on the sad occasion when Mary Crawford monopolises her mare and her aunts combine to give her a bad headache, we read that “ Edmund said no more to either lady, but going quietly to another table, on which the supper-tray ”—note that it is only a tray at Mansfield Park—“ yet remained, brought a glass of Madeira to Fanny, and obliged her to drink the greater part ”.

(Of food eaten at supper we hear nothing except at Hartfield, where it is still a meal, though one dispensed with mixed feelings by the host) We know that Mrs. Bates had “ biscuits and baked apples and wine before she came away ” after sitting with Mr. Woodhouse during the ball at the Crown ; but there was also that “ delicate fricassee of sweetbread and some asparagus ” which he would not let her eat, “ not thinking the asparagus quite boiled enough ”. On another occasion he offers her an egg—“ An egg boiled very soft is not unwholesome. Serle understands boiling an egg better than anybody ”—though not apparently boiling asparagus—“ I would not recommend an egg boiled by anybody else . . . Miss Bates, let Emma help you to a *little* bit of tart—a *very* little bit. Ours are all apple tarts. You need not be afraid of unwholesome preserves here. I do not advise the custard.” Poor man, we know that what he really liked was gruel.

Tea was not a separate meal, but much in the same position as our modern after-dinner coffee. It was served when the gentlemen had joined the ladies in the drawing-room, to which they did not come in a body, but as the humour led them.) It was characteristic of Mr. Woodhouse not to linger—“ neither wine nor conversation was anything to him ”—but Emma is quick to see the compliment Frank Churchill pays her in being “ the very first of the early ” to leave the dinner-table.

( A dinner-visit, therefore, was liable to include three meals, or rather

a meal and two snacks, crowded between the hours of five and ten, while the earlier part of the day was comparatively empty of eating. This arrangement, however, though lopsided, was eminently practical, for it left the hours of daylight free for every kind of engagement and occupation, while the dim hours of candlelight were devoted to eating, card-playing and conversation. Daylight had a special value in those times, but even now many who work hard, whether with head or hand, feel they would work better without the interruption of a meal, and that our ancestors' method of keeping the day clear from breakfast till early evening had much to recommend it. )

(Already, however, in Jane Austen's time, luncheon was creeping in. It had as yet no official position, but picnics were occasions for "eating cold ham and chicken out of doors", and refreshments—ranging from a slice of cake or a baked apple at Miss Bates's to "cold meat, cake, and a variety of all the finest fruits in season" at Pemberley—were always served to morning callers.) Refreshments were offered the guests at Sotherton and at Woodston some time before the formal dinner that wound up the visit, and at Donwell Abbey, Mr. Knightley having rejected Mrs. Elton's plan for "a table spread in the shade" had a "table spread in the dining-room . . . there shall be cold meat in the house." How much mid-morning refreshments were indulged in apart from social occasions we do not know.) Probably they had no place at old-fashioned Hartfield, or in smaller homes such as the cottages at Barton and Uppercross. But we hear of General Tilney "eating his cold meat" without any special excuse at Northanger Abbey, where the dinner-hour was a late one, and as that hour grew steadily later, some sort of meal between breakfast and dinner became increasingly necessary. (It was not till dinner-time had reached the hour of seven that tea, too, was introduced into the vacuum between it and breakfast and "afternoon tea" became the fashion.)

(We have then in a Jane Austen novel proportionately as many meals as in an Edwardian drawing-room comedy; but about the food actually eaten at these meals we know even less than we know about the food eaten on the stage. Jane's attitude to food is purely social. She is no Parson Woodford enumerating dishes—a habit indulged in by one of the least attractive of her own parsons; for did not Emma "experience some disappointment" when, overhearing what she had hoped was a declaration of love, she found instead that Mr. Elton was only giving Harriet Smith "an account of the yesterday's party at his friend Cole's, and that she was come in herself for the Stilton cheese and the north Wiltshire, the butter, the celery, the beetroot and all the dessert"? Jane herself is mainly occupied with the guests and conversation, and



how illuminating is the impression she gives of the talk at a dinner-party at those same Coles'—"a few clever things were said, a few downright silly, but by much the larger proportion neither one nor the other—nothing worse than everyday remarks, dull repetitions, old news, and heavy jokes."

(Nevertheless I must confess to much the same personal curiosity about the food as I have about the clothes, but as in the case of the clothes have only occasional scraps of information to satisfy me. G. B. Stern and I once attempted to assemble from the novels a complete menu, to be served presumably at the inaugural dinner of some Antediluvian Order of Janeites. But we were largely thwarted by lack of detail as to all but the main dishes. This is due, of course, to the fact that there were no successive courses as we understand them now. When Mrs. Bennet decided not to ask Darcy and Bingley to stay to dinner because "she did not think that anything less than two courses could be good enough for a man on whom she had such anxious designs or satisfy the appetite and pride of one who had ten thousand a year", she was obviously not thinking of successive servings of single dishes, but of two complete layings and clearings of the table—a custom which seems designed to show the guest that in his honour exactly twice as much food must be eaten as what the family normally consumed when they were alone.)

(These two courses, as we gather from Parson Woodford's information, were almost identical and consisted of a number and variety of dishes, sauces and gravies, with vegetables set at the corners of the table.) I doubt if any table in the novels was ever so well covered as the Parson's, in spite of Mrs. Norris's remark about the Grants' "enormous great wide table. . . . Five, only five to be sitting round that table! However, you will have dinner enough on it for ten, I dare say". Jane gives us as a rule indications only as to the main dish or *pièce de résistance*—a haunch of venison at Mrs. Bennet's, a saddle of mutton at Mr. Weston's. So we are practically without material for our two first modern courses—the soup and the fish.)

(Soup, we know from other sources, was served with the first course—indeed it was not till past the middle of the nineteenth century that it became a course on its own—but Jane Austen never mentions it, except as an extra at balls.) (Indeed, it seems to have had special festive implications.) Miss Bates is thrilled by its appearance at the ball at the Crown, and Mr. Bingley promises a ball at Netherfield "as soon as Nichols has made white soup enough"—a statement not to be taken literally but pointing to the inevitable association of soup with this form of merrymaking. There is also the unforgettable picture of Fanny

Price "creeping slowly up the principal staircase, pursued by the ceaseless country-dance, feverish with hopes and fears, soup and negus, sore-footed and fatigued, restless and agitated, yet feeling in spite of everything that a ball was indeed delightful".

(White soup is the only soup specified by name, so we must start our dinner with that,) though the standard recipe given by Mrs. Beeton is not particularly interesting. (Of fish we have no more choice than the Miss Dashwoods had at the inn, where Mrs. Jennings tried in vain to extort from them "a confession of their preferring salmon to cod". G. B. Stern and I would have no such genteel hesitations, so salmon goes down next on our menu.)

For the main course we have a far wider selection. We have the boiled fowls and veal cutlets to which the Miss Dashwoods were equally indifferent, we have the Longbourn venison (though I am not attracted to it by Mrs. Bennet's statement that "everybody said they never saw so fat a haunch"), the Randalls saddle of mutton, and the Hartfield pork ("Hartfield pork is not like any other pork, but still it is pork"). We have the roast mutton to which the little Knightley boys were hurrying home with their father on the morning of Christmas Eve—mutton which was apparently so much more common on British tables than the roast-beef of old England that an invitation to a family dinner often took the form of "come and eat your mutton with us". We have the turkey, which Mrs. Grant's cook said "would not keep beyond to-morrow". We have, too, the ducks that Mrs. Nichols had ready to kill against Mr. Bingley's return, and the goose which Mrs. Martin sent Mrs. Goddard—"a beautiful goose—the finest goose Mrs. Goddard had ever seen. Mrs. Goddard had dressed it on a Sunday and asked all the three teachers—Miss Nash and Miss Prince and Miss Richardson—to sup".)

But when we come to geese and poultry another question arises. I do not know how aldermanic this dinner is to be, but if it includes an entrée then I am determined to have the delicate fricassee of chicken and asparagus which Mr. Woodhouse sent away. This would make it necessary in the interests of a well-balanced meal to exclude poultry from our main course; but with the choice of pork, mutton, venison, and veal cutlets I do not think we shall fare badly.)

(The sweet is much more difficult, and the selection decidedly thin. We may have the mince pies which Charlotte Lucas was "wanted for", to the contempt of Mrs. Bennet, or the gooseberry tart which failed to bring comfort to poor little Fanny on her first night at Mansfield Park, or the apple tart which Mr. Woodhouse recommended as not unwholesome to Mrs. Bates. If we would eat what he disapproved of (though

I cannot bear to think we should) we might have jam tart and custard. Or we could eat a baked apple (even if baked twice to please Mr. Woodhouse) with Miss Bates, or rice pudding with the same little boys who were hurrying back to the roast mutton at Hartfield. Just as there is more about clothes in *Northanger Abbey* than in any of the novels, so there is more about meals in *Emma*.

Our menu may therefore be written out as follows :

White Soup  
Boiled Salmon  
Fricassee of Chicken and Asparagus  
Roast Saddle of Mutton \*  
Gooseberry Tart

We have left out "the butter, the celery, the beetroot and all the dessert", because we feel that the meal is already substantial enough)

(The next question is what wines to drink at this Janeite feast. She herself mentions only a few, and these are of the heavy, dessert variety. We have port—"stuffy Uncle Philips breathing port-wine" and Madeira—which Edmund made Fanny drink when she had a headache—and that fine old Constantia wine which Mr. Jennings used to take for his colicky gout and which his widow considered equally good for a broken heart. We also have negus, which was a highly potent form of rum punch and well calculated to make Fanny or anybody else feel feverish.

Lighter wines were drunk during the meal itself, but these, too, were probably from Spain or Portugal rather than from France, with which country we were at war for most of Jane Austen's lifetime. Wine was the normal drink at genteel dinner-tables, even when surrounded entirely by females as at Barton Cottage, and no doubt it was often drunk by upper servants, or we should not find Aunt Norris so delighted to discover that wine was never served at "the second table" at Sotherton.

In none of the novels do we find the smallest evidence of the heavy drinking which has become a legend of the period. There are no three-bottle men.) Indeed Catherine Morland becomes indignant when John Thorpe asks if Mr. Allen still drinks his bottle a day, while a young Lucas boy, boasting to Mrs. Bennet that if he was as rich as Mr. Darcy he would keep a pack of foxhounds and drink a bottle of wine every day, is told by her, "then you would drink a great deal more than you

\* We have finally decided on this, as on the whole we dislike the idea of a "fat haunch", and Mr. Woodhouse could not bear to see anyone eating roast pork, and his idea of its being "very thoroughly boiled, just as Serle boils ours", does not appeal to us.

ought, and if I were to see you at it I should take away your bottle directly ". Neither Fanny nor Elinor consumes more than " the greater part " of the wine offered them for headache and heartache respectively, though I doubt if anyone really much enjoyed Mr. Woodhouse's idea of a pleasant drink—" *half* a glass of wine—a *small* half-glass put into a tumbler of water. I do not think it could disagree with you ".

*Dear Mr. Woodhouse.\*

## CHAPTER VI

### *The Mansfield Park Quartette*

G. B. STERN

IF I were allowed a brief visit to Jane Austen's pleasant Queen Anne house in Paradise, for the purpose of asking her three questions, no more, with a further condition (in fear of Cassandra) that none of them may concern her private life, one of them would be : " What, Miss Austen, did you secretly feel about Fanny's chance of happiness with Henry Crawford ? I mean," I would flounder on, " honestly now, wouldn't she have had much more fun with Henry than with her grave cousin Edmund ? " Wishing to hear Miss Austen concede my point, I should make my voice as persuasive as possible ; yet if, in modern parlance, she knew all the answers, she might have bidden me remember that Fanny did not desire *fun* ; Emma, yes ; and Elizabeth ; but Fanny Price, with her sensitive conscience, her lack of worldliness, her distressed consideration for others, her shrinking from publicity, Fanny who was all gentle stubbornness, Fanny was more appropriately matched with Edmund and Mansfield parsonage than triumphantly mistress of Henry Crawford's easy-going establishment at Everingham.

Yet whereas Jane discusses at length whether Fanny might not have improved Henry's morals in time, had she married him, I cannot help wondering whether, very much on the contrary, Henry might not have wonderfully improved Fanny's temperament ? Fanny is, I must reluctantly admit, Miss Austen's own property, and, we learn from her letters, a favourite heroine ; which carries us towards that always agreeable discussion, however irrelevant, as to how much an author can be permitted still to possess her own books or her own characters, once they have been pushed out into the world ? I would rather it were not used against me in future, if I now maintain sturdily for the sake of present argument, that gradually, invisibly, they become the property of the reader rather than of the writer. At this moment, therefore, Fanny Price, Edmund Bertram and the Crawfords belong to me, and we may start again.

Married to Henry and in daily association with him, Fanny must have benefited more than from anything Edmund could have taught her. Except that he was conceited and she humble, Edmund was too like herself. Crawford, however, could have assisted her to mental flexibility,

✓ a lighter touch on life, a wider tolerance, less dismay on almost every possible occasion. The man was not rubbish ; fundamentally he had plenty of character and strength of purpose ; better stuff, on the whole, than his sister Mary ; though she also had her excellencies, mainly her unwavering affection for him, and her swift partisan spirit in the right cause, which prompted her firmly to move away from Mrs. Norris when that lady insulted Fanny in public about her dependence and poverty. "I do not like my situation ; this *place* is too hot for me." . . . Miss Crawford frequently shows herself keenly perceptive on behalf of others, though her skin is often too thick to receive a warning for herself. This way round is unusual. Both Crawfords, too, belong to that rare and valuable company whose entrance at any moment will *lift* the air instead of burden it. It is not only that they are gay : perpetual liveliness can be extremely depressing or wearisome ; but they are endowed with a certain vitality which pours itself out in warmth and interest for their friends' concerns ; the moment Henry and Mary Crawford appear, they diffuse a sense of well-being. At the ball given by Sir Thomas Bertram for Fanny and Edmund : "The entrance of the Grants and Crawfords was a favourable epoch. The stiffness of the meeting soon gave way before their popular manners and more diffused intimacies : little groups were formed, and everybody grew comfortable." I claim that this is more than merely their social and sociable sense ; it is, as I said before, a bright quality that springs from the heart, and we should do very ill without it (Henry VIII, who wrote the song "Pastime with good company I love and shall until I die", would undoubtedly have placed a couple of spare-rooms at Hampton Court at the free disposal of the Crawfords ; and the Borgias would have been perpetually inviting them to drop in and take pot-luck). Their elder sister, Mrs. Grant, had the same good nature : it was she who, prompted by Mary, relieved the strain for Fanny, during the casting of "Lovers' Vows", by readily volunteering for the unimportant part of Cottager's Wife ; she, again, who offered to spend a whole day sitting with Lady Bertram (and it is no use pretending that this would have been amusing) so as to set both Fanny and Edmund free for the expedition to Sotherton.

They were debonair ; or, separating the words, *de bon air*.

But Henry's principles appear to have been rooted in deeper soil than Mary's. Whether or not the author would have been surprised, as authors sometimes are, at this involuntary happening, his breeding was finer and therefore his good taste. Mary sometimes jarred by being sprightly at the wrong moment ; Henry hardly ever. They both were careless and extravagant, fond of pleasure, luxury and flirtation ; nor did they always speak respectfully of their elderly relations ; yet nothing

that Mary could say against her uncle, the Admiral, could shock me one half as much as the style of Fanny and Edmund in discussion and censure upon her remarks :

“ She ought not to have spoken of her uncle as she did. I was quite astonished. I could not have believed it ! ”

“ I thought you would be struck. It was very wrong ; very indecorous.”

A solemn dialogue which might have been exceedingly diverting could we have been reassured that Jane Austen herself had conceived it in this spirit. But did Jane know ? I am uneasy on that score. Was her own point of view contained in the point of view of Fanny and Edmund ? Edmund pleads, and Fanny grants, that Mary's disrespect of her uncle sprang from hot loyalty to her aunt, seeing her suffer from a choleric, unfaithful husband. Fanny herself, on the contrary, never seemed to feel such compassion for her own mother, such warm, natural indignation against her father for not being a better husband. All that she felt on her return to her Portsmouth home was dislike of the cramped surroundings and the slovenly domestic arrangements ; a wistful nostalgia for the spaces and amenities of Mansfield Park ; and a very natural girlish shame that her father's voice was so loud and Rebecca's mutton so greasy, when Henry Crawford suddenly came down to visit her. The sad truth of it was, that Fanny and Edmund really enjoyed getting together and sighing a little over the faults and bad upbringing of the Crawfords ; they enjoyed it as much as Henry and Mary enjoyed flirting ; it gave them a kick and relieved the pent-up irritation which may arise from too much virtue. I am sorry to have to say it, but Henry deserved a more responsive wife than Fanny. The most hopeful moment of affinity between them occurred when Crawford read aloud from “ Henry VIII ” :

... It was truly dramatic. His acting had first taught Fanny what pleasure a play might give, and his reading brought all his acting before her again.

Yes, he had knocked at a door in the wall here, pushed it open a few inches ; a narrow door and overgrown with briars, but it led to the inner garden. And in his talk with Edmund, when the reading was over and the spell broken, he showed such good sense, such instinctive wisdom in all he said about Shakespeare, about reading aloud, about education for boys, that proved he had more in him than the superficial gallantry and wit by which serious-minded Fanny could never be won.

Was Fanny ever human ? Yes, two or three times. I like the picture of her in her ball-dress practising her steps about the drawing-room, as long as she could be sure that that holy terror, her Aunt Norris, would

not catch her at it. But she was obsessed from her childhood by a deep sense of inferiority, started, no doubt, by her mother's partiality for her brothers, and certainly not improved by her removal to Mansfield Park and her Aunt Norris's reminders of her lowly state (Mrs. Norris's rough and ready cure for any wound was to rub salt into it and repeat at frequent intervals). Possibly the fact that she was physically small and slight and delicate might have aided the trouble. I cannot remember a single place in *Mansfield Park* where Fanny laughs; yes, once, discussing the ball, two days after, with Mrs. Grant and Mary Crawford: "In a very handsome style, with all the heightenings of imagination and all the laughs of playfulness which are so essential to the shadow of a departed ball." Even when William comes at last to stay at Sir Thomas Bertram's mansion, what ought to have been pure enjoyment for Fanny was still knotted up by a million tiny unnecessary dreads and prohibitions, which call forth no astringent comment such as Elinor was wont to use on Marianne's exaggerations; so that I suspect the author has grown a little blind in her favouritism; and that might account for an opposite reaction in us. We are told that Fanny is not petty enough to rejoice at her "conquest" of Henry, hitherto so invulnerable, so sought after in London society:

. . . "Oh! that I could transport you for a short time into our circle in town," Mary writes to her, "that you might understand how your power over Henry is thought of there! Oh! the envyings and the heartburnings of dozens and dozens; the wonder, the incredulity that will be felt at hearing what you have done! . . ."

This is juvenile, frank and charming, but Fanny, and, alas, Miss Austen, consider it reprehensible; even if we admire Fanny for not succumbing to even one moment's glow of unworthy elation, she forfeits it when she reveals to Edmund at the end of the book how and why Mary Crawford had written to her, not too unhappily anticipating the demise of Tom, the elder son and heir of the baronetcy:

Fanny, now at liberty to speak openly, felt more than justified in adding to his knowledge of her real character, by some hint of what share his brother's state of health might be supposed to have in her wish for a complete reconciliation. This was not an agreeable intimation.

Need Fanny have done this? Edmund had already given up all idea of Mary Crawford. Need she have contributed this final damnation of an unsuccessful rival? Sheila Kaye-Smith argues that she was justified; for otherwise, though he professed to have given up all thought of his first love, Edmund might have continued to let his mind dwell on her in



regret ; Fanny, she thinks, was acting more as a surgeon than as a demure little cat. I disagree. Mary, of course, was an idiot to scribble her thoughts so openly to Fanny ; but adoring her brother Henry as Fanny adored her brother William, she found it impossible *not* to believe Fanny was really in love with Henry, and that she might therefore confide freely in her, as young ladies did ; as young ladies do. It was as human of Mary to rejoice at a distant prospect of Sir Edmund (whom, I maintain, she did sincerely love) as it was human of Fanny to want Edmund to know that Mary Crawford had once been hopeful of this happening. What I desire, and have no hope of ever being granted, is Jane's agreement that they were both human and both wrong ; not always Fanny white and Mary black ; Fanny fair and Mary dark ; Fanny good and Mary bad. Fanny need not have told Edmund ; she should have risked her luck on being able to hold him without it. With Mary in the flesh so utterly vanquished, if her image were left uncracked for him to enshrine, well, it would have grown dusty with the years ; gradually he would hardly have noticed it was there at all. But self-mistrust was always at the source of Fanny's troubles. She took no risks.

Fanny's tremulous self-distrust (and Freud has a word for it ; two words) becomes delicious and a little touching when she could hardly believe her own courage at taking out a library subscription so that her young sister Susan should have books to read :

. . . "amazed at being anything *in propria persona*, amazed at her own doing in every way, to be a renter, a chuser of books ! "

Jane Austen calls her " my Fanny " ; " My Fanny, indeed, at this very time, I have the satisfaction of knowing, must have been happy in spite of everything." She can never be *my* Fanny. Yet, defying those who may declare me incapable of appreciating delicacy and gentleness in a Jane Austen heroine, I can reply immediately that I do appreciate ✓ Anne Elliot, in *Persuasion*, above all others. Anne, I feel, is what Jane Austen intended Fanny to be. Fanny had early disadvantages ; but aside from poverty, so had Anne ; Anne had a despicable father, yet she shows not the slightest trace of it in her enchanting disposition. Happy Wentworth to have come to his senses at last, and seen not only that she is still young, lovely and intelligent beyond all compare, but also that she has a delicacy and sweetness of nature, an appreciation of fairness and justice, a lack of vanity, a breadth of mind, a quickness of fancy, a capacity for courage and endurance, everything that must bring a man to realise his good fortune in having won such a woman to share his life and forward his career. I could assemble one instance after another of what attaches me to Anne Elliot : she knows how to behave in emergencies : when

her little nephew hurt his back, no less than when Louisa Musgrove jumped down the steps of the Cobb at Lyme Regis ; she handles her tiresome sister Mary with tact and understanding, and is obliging and interested with her arrogant sister Elizabeth. She can keep secrets ; she promotes domestic harmony as a sympathetic interpreter between the elder Musgroves and Charles and Mary ; though Charles Musgrove had once wanted to marry her, both he and Mary always gave her a welcome which proved that she never allowed his earlier preference to be remembered. Her unassuming narrative of what she had to do when they left Kellynch was alone enough to convince us that she had trained herself to lead a useful, busy existence, without self-pity marring it at every sacrifice. She could make herself equally at home in the seafaring atmosphere of the Crofts and Captain Harville or in the sordid surroundings of Mrs. Smith at Bath. Henrietta, Captain Benwick, anyone who needed spontaneous understanding and encouragement, could be sure of receiving it from Anne. She had keen perception, too, and a sense of humour.

There is no end to what I can find to praise in Anne Elliot ; she deserves all the felicity which her creator bestowed upon her.

Whether consciously or unconsciously, Jane Austen divides her heroines into bold and gentle. Perhaps bold is too strong a word for Emma Woodhouse and Elizabeth Bennet ; lively is nearer. The way of an older with a younger sister—how far did they seem to Jane as prototypes of Cassandra and herself?—or how far, more truly, her younger and her older self ? I should say the former, of the Bennet pair of sisters ; but not of the Dashwoods : Jane Austen in her wildest youth was never foolish enough to have stood model for Marianne ; though she may have been so over-confident and rash in her judgments as to look back with a smile of amusement and a sigh of remorse, to remember herself as Emma when she had already mellowed into Anne.

The schism exists even in their looks. Jane Bennet, Anne, Elinor and Fanny are fair ; Emma, Marianne and Elizabeth are dark ; Marianne, indeed, a gipsy. Apparently it was not the fashion then to admire brunettes.) Gentlemen, dating it may be from the time of Queen Elizabeth with her red hair, had long ago started the emphatic convention of preferring blondes. We are told Elinor had “ a delicate complexion, regular features, and a remarkably pretty figure ”. We know, also, that she was fair, for her rival, Lucy, was described as fair ; and when Edward wore her hair in his ring, Marianne was able to believe it Elinor's, even though she made the comment that it looked to her a shade darker. Here, by the way, we have one of the very rare instances to be found in Jane Austen, of a plot that creaks : Why need Edward have deliberately

worn Lucy's ring, with her hair in it, when he went to stay with his beloved Elinor Dashwood and so earnestly desired to continue keeping his Plymouth entanglement a secret? He cannot have forgotten that he had this give-away ring on his finger; he must have loathed the sight of it; and a finger is within easy view of its owner at almost every moment and does not need a mirror's reminder.

Another bit of creaking plot strikes us with slight surprise, for one is liable to take for granted perpetual perfection in this author of all others. It occurs when Lydia, the youngest of the Bennets, describes her recent wedding to the whole family when Elizabeth is out of the room, so that presently she has to do it all over again, introduced by a somewhat lame: "Lizzy, I never gave *you* an account of my wedding, I believe. You were not by when I told mamma and the others all about it. Are you not curious to hear how it was managed?"—for it was necessary that Elizabeth and Jane should be the only two of the family to hear of Darcy's mysterious share in it. That "you were not by when I told mamma and the others" is extremely unlike the felicitous workmanship that so conceals the structure that, if we think of it at all, we believe each book to have grown as a tree: branch and twig, blossom and leaf, standing by one hour of creation, a miracle of delicate tracery against the sky.

To return to the portraits in our Jane Austen gallery of girls: though they might in extreme youth be innocently pleased when they were "in looks", especially Catherine Morland, who at seventeen had barely emerged from the threat of being a plain gawky girl, they concerned themselves with their appearance no more than with their clothes; and it is left to others to admire them in their absence, rather than pay them direct compliment. Mr. Knightley and Mrs. Weston, for instance, discuss Emma's looks, he with cool detachment, so as to conceal from us, as well as from Mrs. Weston, his true feelings.

"She is loveliness itself, Mr. Knightley, is not she?"

"I have not a fault to find with her person," he replied. "I think her all you describe. I love to look at her; and I will add this praise, that I do not think her personally vain. Considering how very handsome she is, she appears to be little occupied with it."

And it is quite true that Emma, possibly like Jane Austen herself, is generously ready to think far more of the golden beauty of little Harriet Smith than of her own. She is for ever eager to dwell on her protégée's charms, delighted that first Mr. Elton and then Frank Churchill appear to be so thoroughly captivated by Harriet, when in truth Mr. Elton is hankering after the importance of marrying the rich daughter of Mr. Woodhouse, and Frank all along is completely enthralled by the pale,

clear complexion and elegant features of Jane Fairfax. In *Pride and Prejudice* it is made clear to us that Jane Bennet is the beauty of the family, although, as Mr. Darcy remarks, "she smiles too much"—an interesting criticism which somehow leaves an impression that Miss Austen once heard a gentleman actually make this remark about a young lady, and marvelled that he should have thought so. Elizabeth had a pair of fine eyes and a bewitching liveliness. She was no indisputable beauty, nor did she care; not many girls could have repeated with such real relish and amusement the uncomplimentary remarks that Mr. Darcy had made about her at the ball where they first met. "She is tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt me."

Fanny Price and Mary Crawford had looks arranged for rivalry: "what was there now to add, but that he should learn to prefer soft light eyes to sparkling dark ones". (Good old Edmund!) Jane Fairfax was dark; Frank Churchill says:

"You will be glad to hear"—inclining his head, and whispering seriously—"that my uncle means to give her all my aunt's jewels. They are to be new set. I am resolved to have some in an ornament for the head. Will not it be beautiful in her dark hair?"

Anne alone has no opposite, for Louisa is not so formidable that we need call her a rival; Anne's battle is to vanquish her own past, when at nineteen she had been too easily persuaded to turn away from an ardent young Wentworth; it is her sad conviction, when the book opens and they meet again after more than seven years and she is already twenty-seven, her delicate looks faded, that she can hope to attract him no more. So ardently do we long for Anne to regain her power over Frederick, that inwardly we crow loudly over her charming little triumph at Lyme Regis at her first encounter with the stranger who afterwards proved to be her cousin Mr. Elliot, the villain of the story:

It was evident that the gentleman (completely a gentleman in manner) admired her exceedingly. Captain Wentworth looked round at her instantly in a way which shewed his noticing of it. He gave her a momentary glance, a glance of brightness, which seemed to say, "that man is struck with you, and even I, at this moment, see something like Anne Elliot again".

What an exact knowledge Jane Austen showed here, that a man who had previously decided she was past her bloom should immediately awake to consciousness again on perceiving that another gentleman had felt her magnetism. It was evident again and again down the pages of *Persuasion*,<sup>♥</sup> that Anne only needed happiness to make her lovely, and only needed Wentworth's love to make her happy.

We have passed in review the two types of Jane Austen heroine ; let us see if her men also fall into two groups instead of one. And which of them, by modern standards, have glamour ; and which, by period measurement, merely worth and excellence.

Yes, even more swiftly and easily than the girls, they divide to show us on one side the fascinating, unscrupulous personalities of Frank Churchill, Wickham, Willoughby, Crawford, Elliot ; on the other, the men to whom Jane's judgment has awarded the prize : Knightley, Darcy, Edward, Brandon, Edmund, Wentworth.

Of their looks we hear little except that Wentworth has an " open glowing " countenance, adjectives of the day now no longer in use when we wish to commend a man's good looks. Emphasis is laid on Darcy's height. Darcy is, we may believe, the handsomest of the husband group. Mrs. Bennet, after hating him with all the vigour of her nature, cries at once, on hearing he is to marry her second daughter : " O, my sweetest Lizzy, how rich and how great you will be ! What pin-money, what jewels, what carriages you will have ! I am so pleased—so happy. Such a charming man ! so handsome—so tall ! " Something more is revealed when Elizabeth sees his portrait in the family gallery at Pemberley : " a striking resemblance of Mr. Darcy, with such a smile over the face as she remembered to have sometimes seen when he looked at her ". Somehow we can instantly imagine that smile ; it was probably just what his haughty looks needed to make them charming in the literal sense of the word. Normally he is too tall and stiff and silent. I seem to have caught this insistence that he is tall. Obviously glamour heroes have to be tall. He has authority and a certain lordliness, essentially glamour attributes before marriage ; and we may be sure that when Elizabeth begins to find them inconvenient she will know how to deal with him and still remain beloved.

Rebecca West once remarked that the film hero of to-day fulfils the same common need to worship what is tall (again) and splendid, as did the Greek demi-gods and goddesses of old. Charlie Chaplin and the cult of the Little Man then arose to adjust this too physical conception of heroism. But Darcy could have easily been a film hero (was, indeed !). His bearing is symbolical ; he steps down from the heights as from Mount Olympus—or from the hills of Hollywood. The remote legends of his wealth and his great estates in Derbyshire are also in the true hero and Prince Charming tradition. Elizabeth herself says to Jane, when cross-examined as to the moment when her love for him first sprang up from her initial dislike :

" It has been coming on so gradually that I hardly know when it

began ; but I believe I must date it from my first seeing his beautiful grounds at Pemberley."

She is laughing, of course, yet there is a strain of truth in it too, for Darcy was most human against his own background ; though his intimate friend Bingley dares to say of him :

"I declare I do not know a more awful object than Darcy on particular occasions and in particular places—at his own house especially, and of a Sunday evening, when he has nothing to do."

—really the happiest contribution which Bingley makes to *Pride and Prejudice* ; he is a good-humoured fellow, but lacking what may well be Darcy's final qualification to be a glamour hero : for Bingley is *not* exclusive ; Jane can never feel over him what Elizabeth has every right to feel about Darcy : the subtle thrill of knowing that he unbends to so few, yet that she, almost alone, has been able to stir and captivate this difficult man, and inspire that rare smile of the portrait. Yes, he is remote, lordly, exclusive. And so *very* tall.

Knightley, also, is tall and attractive, though he has not quite the same remote splendour as Darcy. Of course, Darcy has the further advantage that he is the Prince who marries Cinderella ; no one can believe the rich, beautiful, headstrong Miss Woodhouse, completely mistress in her father's establishment, to be in need of compassion or rescue from anything except Mr. Woodhouse's fidgety hypochondria ; while Elizabeth, from a worldly point of view, is not nearly so fortunately placed : the second of five daughters, handicapped by the Longbourn entail—"It is a grievous affair to my poor girls, you must confess. . . . There is no knowing how estates will go when once they come to be entailed !" )—with no prospects, as Mr. Collins rightly observes, but one thousand pounds in the four per cents. Living with Mrs. Bennet cannot have been all jam, especially as she cared least for Lizzy among all her girls. On the other hand, Emma herself acknowledges :

"Consequence I do not want ; I believe few married women are half as much mistress of their husband's house as I am of Hartfield ; and never, never could I expect to be so truly beloved and important, so always first and always right in any man's eyes as I am in my father's."

We can be sure that Mr. Knightley had presence, poise and an air of authority. Harriet talks of "his noble look" when he came across the room to ask her to dance after she had been snubbed and scorned by the Eltons. And Emma notices his "downright, decided, commanding sort of manner, though it suits him very well : his figure, and look, and situation in life seem to allow it ; but if any young man were to set about copying him, he would not be sufferable". As Wickham cannot for a

moment stand up against Darcy, neither can that rather trivial fellow Frank Churchill, with his rattling tongue, hold his own against the good sense and better manners of Knightley. Though in a dialogue between himself and Miss Bates, she leaning out of the window of her room and he on horseback below, I shall always maintain that Mr. Knightley went as near rudeness as makes no matter ; of which Emma, one of the company assembled in the next room and hearing every word, might easily have reminded him later, at his severe reprimand after the Boxhill picnic. Yet in spite of his tendency to check Emma where he sees her going badly wrong, he is neither a bore nor a prig ; and re-reading the book, we realise that Emma enjoys being scolded by him, and that he, too, to put it loosely, gets a kick out of it, more than if she had always been amenable. For when the first scolding occurs, over her foolish, snobbish encouragement of Harriet's pretensions, both she and Knightley are already in love, and neither aware of it.

Edward Ferrars, whom for lack of the sub-title of *Vanity Fair*, we must suppose to be conventionally the hero of *Sense and Sensibility*, as Willoughby is the villain and gay seducer, and Colonel Brandon a "gloomy syphon"—(from the idiom of my own Viennese Aunt Malaprop)—Edward is so completely mild and colourless, that we cannot but wonder what he and Elinor, after they were married, found to talk about in the evenings ? No doubt they wagged their heads over Mrs. Dashwood's continual extravagances and optimism ; no doubt they agreed, in their middle-aged sagacity, that Colonel Brandon spoilt Marianne beyond all reason and affection, and what a pity, because it could lead to no good. Could Jane Austen ever have thought of Edward as anything but utterly dull, and in his handling of the Lucy situation, in his subjection to a discourteous mother, both weak and stupid ? Elinor is not always attractive ; we cannot deny that she is a little too prudent and rather more than a little self-righteous, but at least she has positive good qualities ; her manners command our admiration over and over again ; quite considerable strain is put upon them, as she has to be for ever covering up Marianne's blatant disregard of all decent and grateful obligations, for which extreme youth is not a sufficient excuse, otherwise why should Catherine Morland be capable always of such uniformly diffident and polite behaviour to her elders ?

Elinor deserves a more stimulating mate than Edward, but no one better is provided. Willoughby escaped, I think, from the author's intention that he should be worth no more than Wickham in *Pride and Prejudice*. Wickham was cheap and impudent and heartless, incapable of truth or suffering ; but once, at least, Willoughby feels enough and confesses enough to startle us as well as Elinor into genuine sympathy

with him for the way he has muddled his love-affair and landed himself with a wife he cannot endure. Yet mark the wisdom of Elinor's remark, springing from Jane Austen's judgment of the lighter type of young man :

"At present he regrets what he has done. And why does he regret it? Because he finds it has not answered towards himself. It has not made him happy."

Willoughby, in Elinor's opinion, was the victim of "too early an independence"; as were Henry Crawford and Frank Churchill. There is no harm in Frank, but he is indiscreet; he talks too much; his tactless gaiety—(Jane Fairfax, poor infatuate, speaks of "his delightful spirits" and "that playfulness of disposition")—is enough to make the angels weep; when the party at Box Hill is on the edge of a volcano it is Frank who precipitates the discomfort of the occasion into open failure by his silly proposition that everyone must immediately say: "either one thing very clever . . . or two things moderately clever; or three things very dull indeed". Again and again he pushes Jane Fairfax out of the frying-pan of discomfort into the fire of real despair, till finally she can bear no more. He can be polished in compliment, but his innate manners are shocking; he never visited his father till Jane Fairfax happened to be visiting her aunt in the same neighbourhood; he shuffled together the alphabet letters to spell the word "blunder" and placed it in front of her, in despite of all risks from the company looking on. How right was Mr. Woodhouse when he remarks: "That young man is very thoughtless. Do not tell his father, but that young man is not quite the thing." A verdict which we may compare with the ironic verdict on Wickham by a differently constituted parent, Mr. Bennet, but amounting to much the same: "He is as fine a fellow as I ever saw. He simpers, and smirks, and makes love to us all. I am prodigiously proud of him."

Willoughby has a few redeeming points which the other two have not; though I believe Jane Austen would here disagree; for though she will not give her heroine to Frank Churchill, she does at least present him with the hand of sweet Jane Fairfax; whereas Wickham gets the Lydia he deserves; and Willoughby, when he loses Marianne, loses her for ever. Churchill and Willoughby are displayed in the same predicament: young men of extravagant tastes and upbringing, dependent on the caprices of a rich, elderly relative who would never sanction their engagement to a young lady without means. Of course at that period a gentleman either took Orders or was owner of a large estate and occupied by its duties, like Darcy and Knightley and presumably Bingley (that easy-



going character familiar on any old-fashioned playbill as "Charles his friend"). Wickham, Willoughby, and Churchill being neither clergymen nor estate owners, had undoubtedly too much time to get into mischief; they were successful, socially; and you never heard them complain, "I wish I had a career." Wentworth was in the navy, and Mr. John Knightley a barrister, and as these were highly respected wherever they went, it could not have been socially necessary for the boys of the Willoughby Brigade to do absolutely nothing at all. But Willoughby, in his confession to Elinor when Marianne lay, as he thought, dying upstairs, showed himself capable of real remorse and self-discovery.

Henry Crawford needed only one instant of acknowledgment from his creator, and we would have had him where I truly believe most of us desire him: as the hero of *Mansfield Park*, instead of its attractive villain.

(Mr. Elliot, though meant to be another of these smooth-tongued, flattering, unprincipled adventurers, can be set aside altogether, because Jane Austen did, I think, so despise him that he fails to be fascinating even before his real character is disclosed.

Wentworth, in spite of his creator's obvious intentions, has not altogether "happened" as a glamour hero. Which carries out my contention that here Jane is probably working from a living model, and cares a little too much that her readers shall care for him too. Love induces a strange helplessness in an author; slight carelessness often and unfairly leads to more effective results. A circumstance to aid my theory occurs in the little scene of their reunion in Bath, after Anne has heard he is not, after all, attached to Louisa Musgrove. This should be an emotional episode, taut with even more suspense than their second encounter at the concert; yet the concert scene succeeds, where the previous scene in the shop is spoilt by the unromantic picture of gallant Captain Wentworth with a new umbrella prudently dangling over his arm: "'I have equipped myself properly for Bath already, you see.'" Now, transcribing from real life, when you are in love everything is drenched in a golden glory; the most commonplace trifle glows in retrospect like a bed of nasturtiums in the blazing sun; and I feel that for this incident, Jane Austen was quite simply remembering. For purpose of pure fiction, an author would, I think, leave out, not the sober umbrella itself, but his mentioning that he had been out and bought one that very day for his own use: "I have already, as you see, equipped myself for Bath"—it gives us the wrong picture, just at that moment; the homely reference is not even engaging, as they so often are, and we lose sight of his ardour and his suspense. Nor is he particularly resourceful or exciting, at the moment of Louisa's fall. I like him best when in

protection of Anne, he notices her fatigue and insists she should finish her walk and return in the Crofts' dog-cart ; and when, again protecting her, he masterfully and in silence lifts her little nephew from her back.)

Jane Austen can impart tremendous satisfaction out of these tiny instances of chivalry, as when Knightley rescues Harriet from the ignominy of being without a partner.

Even more pleasant to a reader is the sight of Henry Tilney protecting Catherine. Henry Tilney is the nicest of all the Jane Austen men—(How he would censure us for "nice" in the wrong context ! ) He has more humour than either Darcy or Knightley, otherwise he could make a third with them. As for throwing him in with Edmund and Edward simply because all three are clergymen, the notion is too absurd to let the mind dwell on it. Besides, clergyman or not, superficially Henry certainly presents a more dashing figure than either of these sober gentlemen.

Henry had a gift, shared by neither Darcy nor Wentworth, though a little by Knightley : he was a born tease, as Catherine was a born subject for teasing. Instinct, kindness and good manners kept him from ever hurting her feelings ; on the contrary, he was a sentinel who saved that tender innocence, that serious childish ignorance, from being hurt by others ; over and over again he consoled her by some swift, apt sentence, without letting her be aware that she was in the very best possible way living under his protection. But how he delighted in puzzling her about the complicated motives of Isabella Thorpe ; about her misuse of the English language, and on her romantic expectations of life and abbeys, grown from Mrs. Radcliffe's novels as mushrooms are grown from spawn. If only Henry Crawford had found himself able to tease Fanny a little more . . . but no, she would have shrunk from him and shed tears.

I should say that Tilney might be Crawford's natural friend and affinity ; he combines Crawford's intelligence and keen sense of irony, his generosity and amiability, with somewhat higher, steadier principles. I must concede a difference in that Henry Tilney, even had he been of the laity, could never have run away with Mrs. Rushworth ; apart from any moral consideration she would have bored him with her vanity and her complacency. The same discrimination which made Henry Crawford awake at last to the idea that Fanny was the only girl who could fix him (I use Jane Austen's expressive idiom) caused Henry Tilney to delight in Catherine's perpetual naïve revelation of her own heart ; a heart of such transparent honesty that it deserved a Tilney ; though Miss Austen, still youthful when she wrote *Northanger Abbey*, herself teased romantic readers by pretending that he only fell in love with Catherine because

he observed that Catherine had fallen in love with him. Frank Swinner-ton in his preface to the Adelphi Edition, offers an interesting and plausible theory that Tilney is a male incarnation of Jane Austen herself, in this third novel, after she has already figured autobiographically as Elizabeth and Elinor. I agree that an author desires a representative in every book, to coincide with her own mind and spirit, though not necessarily in more obvious ways. Henry's point of view is certainly similar to Elizabeth's and therefore to Miss Austen's. Tilney fell in love with Catherine chiefly because she never spoke a word which did not reveal a mind of crystal ; it took her some time to discover that all intentions were not as straightforward as her own : Isabella's, for instance, Frederick Tilney's or the General's. When their deeds contradicted their words, when their professions and performances failed to correspond, she passed from one state of bewilderment to another ; so that we are relieved when she found someone as essentially decent as Tilney to direct and influence her, or it might have been a grievous matter ; for if Catherine had a fault, it was that she yielded a little too easily to influence and suggestion ; like Marianne's bad manners, this need not be solely due to her youth ; she was probably to remain impressionable all her life. However, she can safely be left to Henry and his sister Eleanor. Yes, Catherine was luckier than Harriet ; both were easily guided, but the Tilneys were more trustworthy moulders of wax than wilful, confident Emma Woodhouse, herself so desperately in need, though she did not know it, of the tutelage which she was soon gladly to receive from Mr. Knightley. Mr. Knightley alone could correct Emma's saucy, snobbish outlook upon her fellow men and women. His was a wise nature, wise and sensible ; but Henry Tilney combined these with wit and cheerful irony. I cannot be grateful enough to Jane for making a match between him and my favourite little Catherine ; for the two of Jane Austen's heroines whom I love best are the youngest and the oldest ; Elizabeth Bennet is the world's sweetheart, so I will be a little aloof and place her only fourth in my private list ; indeed she is a charming creature, though there are moments when I echo her mother's : " Lizzy, remember where you are, and do not run on in the wild manner that you are suffered to do at home." Possibly Jane Austen herself had often received such a reprimand, though more gently uttered and only when they were alone, from her beloved elder sister Cassandra ; she was nearly all Elizabeth at the time when she wrote *Pride and Prejudice*.

I am perplexed, I confess it, where to place Fanny Price in my two groups of girlhood in Jane Austen. She appears to have the youth, the lack of sophistication, the willingness to be guided, of the younger group ; nevertheless, I think she belongs to the older ; no doubt Jane

expected her nature to resolve, later on, into the same perfect music that I seem to hear whenever I am reading about Anne ; she uses the same words when she describes their invariable high motives, their conduct and resolution, their readiness for service. Nevertheless, there the resemblance ends. Every author, in fashioning a character, cannot finish it by industry alone, by brilliance or by prayer ; there will be something yet to come ; a final grace to be lent, so capricious in its entrances that one might almost dare to call it luck, instead of the loftier term, inspiration. Jane Austen, from her own comments on *Persuasion* and *Mansfield Park*, was not aware that inspiration had touched her in the shaping of Anne, but that Fanny lacked just that rare felicity in whatever she did or said. Fanny was a prig. All her inward struggles, therefore, the perpetual shredding and the tending of her conscience, leave me faintly impatient. A little less of it would have been enough, and might have left her more time to mend that torn carpet which was such a permanent affliction in her poor mother's temper :

“ I'm sure if I have spoken to Rebecca once, about that carpet, I am sure I have spoke at least a dozen times ; have not I, Betsey ? And it would not be ten minutes' work.”

But :

By sitting together upstairs, they avoided a great deal of the disturbance of the house ; Fanny had peace, and Susan learned to think it no misfortune to be quietly employed.

I have tried to account for Miss Austen's preference for this Fanny of hers, for I cannot remember that she ever wrote of Anne as “ *my Anne* ”. She may not have realised how, through years of experience, of unhappiness, of loss and ill-health, she was herself gradually crossing over from the sunshiny, Elizabeth Bennet side of the room to that other group standing in deeper shadow ; did not realise, in fact, the change which twenty years had brought about in the heedless, witty, attractive girl who had so often deserved a gentle reprimand from an elder sister. If, by the time she wrote *Persuasion*, Anne *was* herself, that very self who had lost her bloom, lost her beloved, and learnt to do without both, if Anne was herself in wisdom and resignation, this would have been enough to prevent her from seeing the lovely perfection of Anne : the sculptor who created Galatea was not aware that Galatea had a soul until he laid down his tools and she moved and spoke. She can never have thought timid little Fanny was herself ; therefore she was readier to admire Fanny's sweetness and service, unaware of a sort of fidgety self-concern in Fanny, a humility so inconveniently near the surface as to bother everyone who had to deal with it, even William ; a tendency to act as

wet-blanket for dear conscience' sake. Anne would further any scene of innocent pleasure, however her own heart ached, not wet-blanket it ; she would play the piano for hours so that the more gleeful members of the party should dance ; but Fanny drew Edmund away from Mary Crawford and her harp ; Fanny was found with a long face and a headache when Mary borrowed Edmund's horse for four mornings in succession ; crossness and jealousy would have been human, but here we had first resignation, and then martyrdom ; Fanny, like Sir Thomas, disapproved of the theatricals (but she was a young girl, not an august elderly baronet) ; she tried to prevent Maria Bertram and Henry Crawford from finding their way past the locked gate and the ha-ha at Sotherton. (Anne did all in her power to make the expedition to Lyme Regis a success, and later the concert under Lady Dalrymple's patronage. At the hotel in Bath, when the Harvilles, the Crofts and the Musgroves arrive, the party can do nothing without Anne : " She was entreated to give them as much of her time as possible, invited for every day and all day long, or rather claimed as a part of the family ; and, in return, she naturally fell into all her wonted ways of attention and assistance." And " I am sure neither Henrietta nor I should care at all for the play if Miss Anne could not be with us."—Just as the Bertrams said they could do nothing without the Crawfords.

Which leads us on to the discovery that it is not alone the quality of ✓gaiety, delightfully infectious as it is, which puts a heroine so eagerly in demand by relations and friends in sorrow and in pleasure ; it is a fountain quality ; a river of life quality.) Curiously enough, when we examine the sisters in *Sense and Sensibility*, Elinor, with all her views on prudence and propriety, had it more than the more vivid, romantic, heedless Marianne. Marianne was too closely wrapt in her own desires and preferences, just as Fanny, of the opposite group, was too closely cramped into the narrow places imposed by her own timidity and conscience. Elinor Dashwood lectured her mother and lectured Marianne, tried to reduce their nonsense and extravagance to sense and fact, but she was forever readier to adapt herself than Marianne ; whether shopping with Mrs. Jennings, a guest at the Middletons, or helping Lucy Steele to make a filagree basket for a spoilt child. If only Elinor had not presently pointed out her own unselfish silence during heavy trouble, we would surely have found it out for ourselves and admired her for it. She forfeits some, but not all our admiration when she says :

" If you can think me capable of ever feeling—surely you may suppose that I have suffered *now*. The composure of mind with which I have brought myself at present to consider the matter, the consolation

that I have been willing to admit, have been the effect of constant and painful exertion ;—they did not spring up of themselves.”

All this is too solemn ; yet I am inclined to defend her by believing that it was not so much complacency as a desperate and not very skilful attempt to shame Marianne into some state of self-control and decency. If Marianne had not been exposed to such genuine anguish when Willoughby was false to her, we might be left ever so slightly on the wrong side of liking her at all. For her nonchalant manners are crude beyond a joke ; and her sureness that the discoveries she has made by the time she is seventeen are the only true and final ones, exasperate even a reader lenient of youth and folly. Though enslaved by the magic of Jane Austen, she would not have us indiscriminately enslaved ; incapable of niceness in our judgments ; so she would hardly blame me for blaming Marianne. Yet the young girl’s tragedy is so vividly translated, as she lies on her bed at Mrs. Jennings’s house in Conduit Street, with Willoughby’s letters in her hand and “ almost screams with agony ”, unbearable revelation of what someone we love can do to us if their love is not so great as our own, that it does not seem possible ever to dislike Marianne again. Poor child ; poor wounded child. Even Anne is not so tormented, for she must always have had a mind to sustain her, even at seventeen ; whereas Marianne has evolved no such protection against the storm. Marianne can only rush out in thin shoes into a damp shrubbery on a rainy night, and thus fashion some sort of fools’ consolation out of rashness. Emma, too, like Anne, has a mind with which to meet grief ; she is heavy-hearted, but she is not sunk when she believes she has lost Knightley to Harriet ; she can still determine that her father shall feel no effects from her own grief. Yes, Emma, as well as Anne, commands our respect. Jane Bennet and Elinor Dashwood can also meet perfidy and disillusion with fortitude and put on a serene disguise. Elizabeth is given very little suffering to try her ; she has but hardly discovered that she could love Darcy after rejecting him than here is Darcy back again, ready to stoop his pride and put his fortune to the test for the second time.

But I have not yet done with the *Mansfield Park* quartette. Why does Jane Austen condemn in Crawford what she condones in Wentworth, flirting with two sisters simultaneously, certain (whatever the motive) that the result must be to make at least one, if not both, unhappy ? Why always this extra call for discipline where Crawford was concerned, as though the author herself were in danger and determined not to succumb to his fascination and lack of moral rectitude ? Granted they were just flirting, had Jane herself never flirted ? Did not Elizabeth flirt with

Wickham, Emma with Frank Churchill ? Certainly Wentworth flirted with Henrietta and Louisa Musgrove, to salve a pride still sore from Anne's desertion eight years before.

Henry Crawford was not less a suitable mate for Fanny because he flirted, in this case mischievously rather than defiantly, with Maria and Julia Bertram ; and Fanny was a prim little goose to censure it so severely.

And how is it, as Edmund's judgment was shown forming Fanny's from the beginning, as he was older and much wiser than Fanny, and his integrity above reproach, that his verdict on Henry Crawford as the right husband for his little cousin was not regarded by her as more valuable ? His advantage over Fanny was not only in years ; he had had wider opportunities and an education far exceeding hers. When he approves of Crawford's suit and encourages it, when he does his utmost to persuade Fanny to care for Henry, we must be able to acquit him of merely a bias towards Mary Crawford's brother. Edmund's blindness towards Mary's imperfections is human in a lover, but it is unlikely they would cover Henry too ; so if his honest opinion of Henry was high enough to cause him to use all his influence with Fanny to persuade her into saying yes to this match, he would scarcely do so from a trivial feeling that it would be agreeable to bring both the Crawfords into the family, to round off the quartette. No, he was genuinely persuaded that it would be for Fanny's well-being, and, so, I am sure, must Jane Austen herself have been persuaded, from the sincerity she adds to Henry's exciting, eloquent wooing at Mansfield ; his charming and considerate behaviour (not superficially but truly charming) to all Fanny's family when he comes down to visit her at Portsmouth. Throughout that visit, and after, I am tolerably sure, the author was plainly herself in favour of his marriage with Fanny. What, then, caused her so suddenly to change her mind and drag in an arbitrary and unconvincing elopement with Maria Rushworth to cause horror and confusion, the end of Crawford for Fanny, the end of Mary for Edmund ? What caused such an inexplicable swerve against the claims of Henry Crawford ? If Miss Austen had chosen to work out the story to show the final triumph of good over worldliness in two marriages, instead of good pairing off with good and leaving 'worldliness to get on as best it might, it could hardly have made a better book—genius remains genius, however skillfully we argue—but she might have led, by such a solution, to the establishment of a more subtle and a more satisfactory theme. For as it reads at present, we are bidden contemplate, not the triumph of evil, but certainly what is not far removed from it, the failure of goodness : Edmund and Fanny could *not* redeem the Crawfords ; not by example, nor by the influence of love. Edmund ~~presently~~ found it possible to console him-

self with Fanny, whose unrequited adoration for him is plaited so persistently in and out of the pages that we might have supposed feminine constancy to be the theme of the book, as with Anne Elliot in *Persuasion*, but for the strong hint to the contrary given us in the passage :

Would he have persevered, and uprightly, Fanny must have been his reward, and a reward very voluntarily bestowed, within a reasonable period from Edmund's marrying Mary.

It is this passage which, more than the rest, has led me into a belief that Jane Austen, for some reason unknown to us, (not necessarily personal ; there are "author" reasons that may seem equally capricious and inexplicable to the layman) revised her original intentions with regard to the *Mansfield Park* quartette. It is a quartette which we meet nowhere else in her books, with that peculiar interplay of light and shade, flippancy on seriousness ; cross-currents of jealousy and eddies of misunderstanding. She *had* nourished a regard for Crawford—yet suddenly, strongly, she will have none of him. Her sense of true religion—which we respect in her other novels because it exists naturally and is diffused by the actions and sacrifices of her characters rather than by their words—suddenly finds vent in a self-righteous harangue of several pages, addressed by Edmund to Mary Crawford and repeated by Edmund to Fanny. Not often do we use modern Transatlantic slang in impertinent comment on any of Jane Austen, yet I can hardly refrain from depriving Mary of the retort that he had sure spoken a mouthful. For a mouthful it certainly was. Is it possible that the author has allowed him to escape with her approbation instead of the light scorch of her mockery ? I prefer to guess that she was in an unusual mood ; the same mood which impelled a change of theme and a strong revulsion against Crawford, could approve of Edmund when twice, in performance and in narrative, he behaved like a solemn, pompous, intolerant ass. Sheila Kaye-Smith attributes it to the Evangelical Revival then in progress. The last chapter, flat, diffuse and laboured, left me with an idea that Jane Austen had to work hard before she was satisfied with this arbitrary version of the affair ; had to induce auto-intoxication by statements such as : " what was there now to add, but that he should learn to prefer soft light eyes to sparkling dark ones ".

*Mansfield Park* is a title which gives us no clue to the theme intended, in the same way as we are helped by such titles as *Pride and Prejudice*, *Sense and Sensibility* and *Persuasion* ; though, as I remarked before, (the theme of *Persuasion* might rather have been Constancy ; we see constancy in movement throughout the story and its sweet reward at the end, whereas we are merely told there had been some persuasion before the story



started. ) Elinor had Sense, and Marianne too much Sensibility : that theme was steadily worked out from start to finish. My own wish would have been to see Elinor, not Marianne, soberly mated with Colonel Brandon, while Marianne marries a rejoicing widower called Willoughby ; but I am firmly persuaded that this was never once intended by Miss Austen ; proving I am not unconsciously guided by my own desires when I reassert that in *Mansfield Park* the power of steadfast goodness acting on worldly sophistication and causing its successful overthrow might well have been the original theme, deeper and truer than simply showing a good young couple rather tamely consoling one another in the end.

( Compare Fanny and Edmund jogging towards the altar, with the spontaneous sparkle and felicity and the tender depth of the love-scenes of *Wentworth* and Anne united again. "Constancy"—abstract titles are rarely beautiful ; only where Jane Austen uses them have we come to think them so, because they are by now inseparable from the books we love. )

## CHAPTER VII

# “The Sweets of Housekeeping in a Country Village”

SHEILA KAYE-SMITH

BY far the greater part of the scene of the six novels is laid in the country ; which is only to be expected, since by far the greater part of English life was lived there at the time. For a population of under ten million, the country, not the town, was the normal living-space and therefore the normal setting of its fiction. Incomes were derived from estates that were no mere legal collections of invested money but actual estates of fields and woods. In those days the *rentier* class literally lived upon rents.

The novel of country life, then, had not that self-consciousness which it was to achieve in days when the country was something exceptional and remote. By the time George Eliot was writing *Adam Bede*, Victorian industrialism had already clotted the population into the towns, and by Hardy's day the country novel had become a sort of Western, describing a scene and a people unknown to most of its readers. As a result we find country people regarded as a separate human species, instead of being seen as very much like their opposite numbers in towns. In Jane Austen's time it was the townsman who required explanation and apology—either he belonged to those dread circles of trade which cast a shadow over so many respectable families, or he haunted the streets for purposes of dissipation.

In all the six novels only two sets of important characters live permanently in town—the Gardiner family in *Pride and Prejudice* and the John Knightleys in *Emma*—and their residence is a continual source, respectively, of humiliation and distress. For Mr. Gardiner “lived by trade and within view of his own warehouses”, and as for poor Isabella, we have Mr. Woodhouse's word that “Nobody is healthy in London, nobody can be”.

But though permanent residence in a town was exceptional, it was still the custom for many well-to-do families to move into town for the winter or a part of the winter. This movement was not so general in Jane Austen's time as it had been a little earlier, when even the streets of Lewes and Rye were lined with the town houses of the neighbouring

gentry, escaping from country damp and dirt. Nevertheless the custom still existed and can be seen, especially in the earlier novels, though London or Bath are chosen in preference to the smaller towns.

Both London and Bath were indeed notable centres of winter gaiety, combined in the latter case with a covering attention to health. Of the two, Bath appears more frequently in the novels, doubtless because so much of Jane's own life was spent there. Only in *Pride and Prejudice* is it unvisited by any of the characters, and it provides a setting for many chapters both of *Northanger Abbey* and of *Persuasion*. London, on the other hand, plays an important part only in *Sense and Sensibility*, though in *Pride and Prejudice* Jane, Elizabeth and Lydia Bennet can all on various occasions be found staying with their uncle and aunt in Cheapside, and in *Mansfield Park* Fanny is connected by letters with her friends and cousins visiting more reputable parts of the city.

Of all the characters only Mr. Darcy actually possesses a town house. That is a town house in addition to a country estate, for we know that Mrs. Jennings, though she "was in the habit of spending a large portion of the year at the houses of her children and friends, was not without a settled habitation of her own. Since the death of her husband, who had traded with success in a less elegant part of the town, she had resided every winter in a house in one of the streets near Portman Square." Sir Thomas Bertram had a town house, though it was given up when he ceased to be a member of Parliament. (Sir Walter Elliot had obviously only hired his winter abode, and when retrenchment was called for substituted a hired house in Bath—"a very good house in Camden Place—a lofty, dignified situation, such as becomes a man of consequence".) Humbler characters like the Allens, the Thorpes and the Crofts lived in lodgings, and we rather surprisingly find General Tilney in lodgings too; though that may have been because his visit was such a short one ("My father can seldom be prevailed on to give the waters what I think a fair trial") and we know on the authority of Mrs. Allen that his apartments were of a very superior kind, for they "were taken the very day he left them, Catherine. But no wonder—Milsom Street, you know." Travellers like the Musgroves, visiting Bath for no more than a few days, put up at the White Hart.

It is remarkable, however, that by far the greater number of the characters spent the winter in the country, and even for many of those who go to Bath or London it is by no means a regular habit, but an unexpected treat—for the Miss Dashwoods, for instance, and Catherine Morland; one gathers, too, that Mr. Allen's visit was an exceptional one, ordered for the first time "for the benefit of a gouty constitution". Certainly, Mr. Woodhouse, wealthy valetudinarian though he was, never

thought of leaving the country during the winter months, nor did Sir Thomas and Lady Bertram, once the town house was given up. Even Lady Catherine de Bourgh may be found at Rosings in winter. At the beginning of March she was "still in the country", and it was not till early June that she proposed going to London for a week and condescendingly offered seats to Elizabeth Bennet and Maria Lucas—"as Dawson does not object to the barouche box, there will be very good room for one of you; and indeed if the weather should happen to be cool, I should not object to taking you both, as you are neither of you large".

By the way, it is interesting to note that the action of all the novels takes place largely—often mainly—in winter, and during those months of late autumn and early spring when the country even now is supposed to be barely habitable. In *Sense and Sensibility* the Dashwood family arrive at Barton in the early autumn, and the first part of the story—the part concerning Marianne and Willoughby, with the arrival of the Miss Steeles at the Park—is set in the months before Christmas. Elinor and Marianne go with Mrs. Jennings to London early in January, and most of the characters assemble there during the next few weeks. The return to the country is made "very early in April", and we finally take leave of the characters in the late spring.

*Pride and Prejudice*, too, begins in the autumn, runs through the winter (at Longbourn) and the spring (at Hunsford) and then on through the pleasure tour on which Elizabeth accompanied her uncle and aunt to the autumn shooting-season, which brought Mr. Bingley back into the country. *Emma* is another novel which lasts about a year, for, starting also in the autumn, it does not really end till the John Knightleys' autumn holiday a year later, though the main action of the story has come to an end at midsummer. *Northanger* has the briefest run, for Catherine does not go to Bath till after Christmas, and there are only about ten weeks between her arrival there and her return to Fullerton, after which the story is quickly wound up. *Mansfield Park*, on the other hand, has much the longest time-sequence. It is the only one of the six in which the heroine is first introduced as a young child. We get glimpses of Fanny over an interval of years, before the story settles down into the events of a summer and two winters. It comes to an end shortly after Fanny's return from Portsmouth to Mansfield in the late spring.

*Persuasion* is pre-eminently an autumn story (though the Bath scenes are laid in the winter), for it is the autumn scenes that linger longest in the memory—at least in mine. Perhaps this is because in *Persuasion* the weather and scenery have taken on some of the emotional force that permeates the whole book. Anyway, from the moment after Michael-

mas when Anne walked up to Kellynch Lodge, "in a sort of desolate tranquillity", one has a consciousness of misted landscape, of "the last smiles of the year upon the tawny leaves and withered hedges"—of, in fact, "that season of peculiar and inexhaustible influence on the mind of taste and tenderness," even though our modern outlook finds it difficult to associate its lovely decline with the fading bloom of Anne's twenty-seven years.

There are not many descriptions of country scenery in the novels, /not nearly so many as there are of the weather. This is natural when one realizes what an important part the weather plays in country life, a part which cannot have been less in the days before the paved road and the motor-car. On the other hand, the cult of landscape as scenery is something comparatively new. In Jane Austen's time it was coming into fashion under the auspices of the Romantic Revival, but in this she shows very little tendency to be Picturesque. Such descriptions as she indulges in are invariably sedate, written obviously with no further idea than to produce a correct impression of what her people actually saw.

Her description of Abbey-Mill Farm may fairly be taken as a specimen—"The considerable slope, at nearly the foot of which the Abbey stood, gradually acquired a steeper form beyond its grounds; and at half a mile distant was a bank of considerable abruptness and grandeur, well clothed with wood; and at the bottom of this bank, favourably placed and sheltered, rose the Abbey-Mill Farm, with meadows in front and the river making a close and handsome curve around it." It is remarkable that at the end of this map-like description I have only an indistinct idea of what the farm actually looked like—even after the author has elaborated it further with "rich pastures, spreading flocks, orchard in blossom, and light column of smoke ascending".

By the way, this view was seen during a strawberry picnic, so the orchard in blossom is one of those slips on a matter obviously well known which brings Jane Austen endearingly to earth as a fellow author. Actually in her case there are very few of them; in fact I am not prepared to say that this isn't the only one.

As a rule she is more given to describing houses than landscapes. We have pictures of Donwell Abbey—"covering a good deal of ground, rambling and irregular, with many comfortable and one or two handsome rooms"—of Cleveland—"a spacious, modern-built house, situated on a sloping lawn . . . dotted over with timber; the house itself was under the guardianship of the fir, the mountain ash and the acacia, and a thick screen of them all together, interspersed with tall Lombardy poplars, shut out the offices"—of Northanger Abbey—geometrical and confusing: "The whole building enclosed a large

court ; and two sides of the quadrangle, rich in Gothic ornaments, stood forward for admiration. The remainder was shut off by knolls of old trees"—of the Parsonage at Thornton Lacey—clearer through negation : " It is not a scrambling collection of low, single rooms, with as many roofs as windows ; it is not cramped into the vulgar compactness of a square farmhouse."—Barton Cottage, plainly ironic : " as a cottage it was defective, for the building was regular, the roof was tiled, the window-shutters were not painted green, nor were the walls covered with honey-suckles. . . . It had not been built many years and was in good repair."

On the whole Jane prefers houses to be " spacious and well-built ". Hartfield, Mansfield Park and Rosings are all described as modern, and though we are given no idea of the age of Pemberley, the statements that it was " a large, handsome stone building, standing well on rising ground " and that " the rooms were lofty and handsome ", proclaim it of fairly recent date. She has no admiration for the tottering picturesque and would no doubt be surprised at our modern cult of the antique, even though the foundations of it were being laid in mock ruins and bogus hermitages in her own day. To remove a tight, convenient, modern grate in order to use the draughty cavern behind it—in reverse of General Tilney, who had had his ancient fireplace at Northanger " contracted to a Rumford "—would, I am sure, seem to her the act of lunatics.

Her outlook, even on beauty, was eminently practical, just as in her day the country did not exist as the domain of beauty and history but as the normal setting of work and livelihood. It was in the country rather than in the town that livings were made by polite people. We are told that Mr. Bennet's estate at Longbourn brought him an annual income of two thousand pounds, and Mr. Darcy's income, presumably derived from Pemberley, was five times as much. Mr. Crawford's estate at Everingham was worth four thousand a year (" those who have not more must be satisfied with what they have "), just a quarter of the value of Sotherton (" If this man had not twelve thousand a year, he would be a very stupid fellow ").

It all sounds fantastic now, when the ownership of a large estate is usually nothing but a drain on an income derived from other sources. But when taxation and wages were low in comparison with prices, when labour was plentiful and the country mainly self-supporting, landownership was as good a source of wealth as trade and much more genteel. The rents of farms and villages, the sale of timber and crops, all brought in regular money, while allowing a gentleman plenty of leisure for sport and social engagements. Upkeep and repairs cost little, since

labour and material were abundant on the place. It was a leisured, secure, comfortable, useful existence to which our modern country life—either of toil or “retirement”—bears only a light resemblance.

No one in the novels does half the work that a modern landowner, be he squire or farmer, would do to-day. Of all the characters only Mr. Knightley appears to be really busy on his farm. He is by far the least genteel of the Jane Austen squires, for he does not keep carriage horses, even on his farm. Mr. Bennet, we know, had a farm and also carriage horses, because “the horses are wanted on the farm much more than I can get them” (giving us a pleasant, homely picture of the family coach drawn by the ploughman’s team), but he preferred to spend his time reading in his library. Beyond walking round his garden and his succession houses, General Tilney does not seem to have done much on the Northanger Abbey estate, though we know that he could not “in decency fail attending the club . . . they are a set of very worthy men. They have half a buck from Northanger every year ; and I dine with them whenever I can”. He and Mr. Darcy and Mr. Bingley and Mr. Musgrove and Sir Thomas Bertram and Sir Walter Elliot and many others besides all lived the lives of leisured country gentlemen, a type which has almost totally disappeared. They were most of them probably not without culture, nor were they entirely without use, but they certainly did no work as we understand it to-day, either in town or country.

Nor did the clergy work much harder. A couple of sermons a week (and even those we know from Mary Crawford might legitimately be the work of a popular sermon-writer, such as Blair), a liturgical service read on Sunday morning and on Sunday afternoon, a quarterly “Sacrament day”, an occasional baptism, wedding or burial—this with just as much visiting the sick and poor as he chose and a more rigidly enforced attendance at parish and vestry meetings, was the life of the average clergyman.

But we must not be led to false conclusions by all this high-class leisure. Leisure is not necessarily idleness—it merely gives more opportunities for it than work—nor does it exclude, in fact it encourages, useful activity. I imagine that Darcy, Sir Thomas, Mr. Knightley, at least, were all active, useful men, who served their generation probably more effectively than if they had spent twelve hours a day making their money instead of sitting back and watching it roll in. Nor must we imagine that only the gentry were leisured. The whole pace of life was slower, and servants as well as their employers did much less work. The numbers employed—even the reduced family of the Dashwoods had two maids and a man to look after them in their cottage—made light

work even of homes that could scarcely be described as labour-saving, and also allowed the servants to have, especially in large houses, a social life of their own—in contrast with the dreary isolation of the Victorian basement.

Nor did the outdoor workers have such long hours and many labours as their modern descendants. The work of the fields and farms was as unending as it is now, but there were many more to undertake it and divide it. Farms which to-day employ only five or six workers would then have employed twenty or thirty, many of them housed in the farmhouse itself and living with the family. The difficulty with these would not be so much lack of leisure as what to do with it, and the absence of any recreation beyond an occasional feast or fair may be responsible for the countryman's tendency to spin out his task as long as possible, as if afraid that it might come to an end too soon.

✓ Jane Austen lived before the tides of misery that descended on the countryside at the end of the Napoleonic wars. She could still write of villages as "tidy" and "thrifty", while giving us in her novels even fewer agricultural workers than indoor servants. Only Mr. Knightley's William Larkin makes any sort of personal appearance, though we have the gardener at Pemberley who told Elizabeth Bennet and her uncle and aunt "with a triumphant smile" that the park was ten miles round, and Harriet Smith's statement that Mr. Martin "had had his shepherd's son into the parlour one night on purpose to sing to her". One supposes that Jane's attitude to the farm-workers was not unlike that of Emma towards Robert Martin—"precisely the order of people with whom I feel I can have nothing to do. A degree or two lower and . . . I might hope to be useful to their families in some way or other. But a farmer can need none of my help, and is therefore in one sense as much above my notice as in every other he is below it."

✓ We know that Emma was a sort of district visitor in Highbury. The distresses of the poor were "as sure of relief from her personal attention and kindness, her counsel and her patience, as from her purse. She understood their ways, could allow for their ignorance and their temptations, had no romantic expectations of extraordinary virtue from those for whom education had done so little, entered into their troubles with ready sympathy, and always gave her assistance with as much intelligence as good will." Lady Catherine de Bourgh had, as was to be expected, a different technique. "Though this great lady was not in the commission of the peace for the county, she was a most active magistrate in her own parish . . . and whenever any of the cottagers were disposed to be quarrelsome, discontented, or too poor, she sallied forth



into the village to settle their differences, silence their complaints and scold them into harmony and plenty."

(The care of the poor was always a charge on every big estate, a matter of personal responsibility.) Mr. Darcy, the housekeeper told Elizabeth, would be just like his father—"just as affable to the poor"; at Mansfield Park Fanny helped Aunt Norris sew garments for the poor—and indeed a basket of "poor clothes" or "poor sewing" could have been found in every Great House worthy of the name. (Anne Elliot was pleased to have the Crofts as tenants of Kellynch Hall, because the parish would be "so sure of a good example, and the poor of the best attention and relief".)

(It is all very remote from our modern English outlook, and perhaps difficult to imagine in days when the State takes the place of the Family as a dispenser of benefits. But in Jane Austen's time the State was only a cruel stepmother, and the sufferings of the country poor under village bumbledom were enough to prevent their ever applying to such a source if it could be avoided. Where, however, the Great House did its duty they were sure of being cared for on lines more approximate to the working of the banished religious orders than the bureaucracy that had supplanted them. Gifts were in kind rather than in cash) and Emma's first act after visiting the poor family in Highbury was to send one of the children up to Hartfield for some broth. Soup has become a by-word for officious charity, but its present disfavour is probably due as much to a deterioration in the quality of the soup as of the charity. In a recipe for caudle, just a little more recent than Jane Austen's time, the final ingredients are a quart of ale and a tumblerful of gin; and though Mr. Woodhouse's alarms would no doubt have prevented the little girl carrying home from Hartfield anything like this glorious posset, almost certainly her pitcher contained something much more nourishing and appetising than the flavoured dish-wash of a later generation.

Speaking personally, if I had a choice of where to be a pauper, I should choose the Donwell Abbey estate after Emma had married Mr. Knightley. I should avoid Kellynch after the Crofts had given up their tenancy and Anne had become Mrs. Wentworth, because I'm quite sure that "Sir Walter and Miss" would have regarded me as their first (indeed only) economy. As for Rosings, no one would choose the "attention and relief" of Lady Catherine de Bourgh, either as dispensed in person or through her almoner, Mr. Collins. I should also avoid Mansfield in Aunt Norris's day, though probably after she had gone away to live with Maria I should have found the situation fairly comfortable; for I'm sure Sir Thomas, Edmund and Fanny would all have been most attentive and reasonably generous—though lacking

the intelligence that would have made Donwell's charity so much more digestible.

(Donwell—Kellynch—Rosings—Mansfield . . . the question has often been raised as to whether Jane Austen used in her novels the names of actual places. In the case of houses and estates I am pretty sure that she did not, any more than she would use the names of actual persons. In places, too, as in persons, she chooses, as a rule, what is workaday and unremarkable rather than what is original and arresting. Hartfield, Netherfield, Mansfield—she shows a preference for the "field" termination—Longbourn, Uppercross, Winthrop, Meryton, Highbury, all are thoroughly undistinguished. Only Kellynch, Northanger and Everingham stand out with any originality and euphony. In the last of these we have a place-name characteristic of the country in which it is situated. The same occurs in Barton, which is typically Devon; but as a rule any of Jane's places might be anywhere, and indeed her counties are all very like one another. In days when the differences between the various parts of England were much more characteristically defined than they are now, it is remarkable that she shows us entirely the same scene, whether in Kent, Somerset, Surrey or Hertfordshire. The setting of each one of the novels (excluding Bath) is in a different county, but as far as this makes any difference to the general environment they might all have been staged in the same.)

Some years ago there was a controversy in the *Times Literary Supplement* as to the exact village Jane Austen had in her thoughts when she wrote about Highbury. Her description seems to fit a number of Surrey villages, and indeed it is more than probable that she had a number in mind and produced—as so many authors do—a composite picture. The unwisdom of writing of actual people and places must have been as apparent to her then as it is to the majority of writers to-day. But there is one village of which she has recorded the name and position without disguise. Shortly after leaving Steventon on a pilgrimage through Jane Austen's own countryside, I was surprised to find myself driving through a village proclaimed by the Automobile Association to be Fullerton and to see on the signpost exactly as many miles to Salisbury as Catherine Morland had to travel when she was sent home from Northanger Abbey. Fullerton, too, was only a few miles from Steventon, so Jane can hardly have chosen the name at random in ignorance of its actual existence.

This raises the question as to whether if one travelled sufficiently in Northamptonshire one might not find a Mansfield, or a Longbourn in Hertfordshire or an Enscombe in Yorkshire or a Kellynch in Somerset. (Perhaps the Jane Austen villages are not so anonymous as one supposes.)

On the other hand she may have had a special reason for writing about Fullerton—for writing about a clergyman's family in a village so near to her own. She may have known the folk at Fullerton Parsonage and perhaps while discussing with them the follies of the circulating library, jokingly have promised to make their eldest daughter the heroine of a novel. . . . I wonder . . .

## CHAPTER VIII

### “ Her Mind Improved ”

G. B. STERN

IT must be clear that Miss Austen not only held education for girls to be of the highest importance, but that she did not ponder in silence on the subject, as many young ladies of the period must have done in their effort not to be thought a bluestocking. Jane Austen's views, we can have no doubt, would have been demurely expressed on any modern Council in discussion on that question ; but as women did not then sit on Councils, nor were supposed to air their dinner-table opinions on such formidable subjects, only an author had much chance of letting us know them. They appear from one angle or another, satirical or sensible, according to whether Miss Austen chose to use, for instance, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, Henry Crawford or Mr. Knightley as her mouthpiece ; and from these we must make up our minds whether she advocated school for her heroine, or masters at home and a governess to supervise. I am inclined to think the latter ; for a school education is rarely mentioned. Anne Elliot in *Persuasion* and Georgiana Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice* were sent away to school, probably because their mothers were dead. Of Mrs. Goddard's type of school, Jane Austen thought highly, even though Emma and her elder sister Isabella received their education at home :

(Mrs. Goddard was the mistress of a school—not of a seminary, or an establishment, or anything which professed, in long sentences of refined nonsense, to combine liberal acquirements with elegant morality, upon new principles and new systems, and where young ladies for enormous pay might be screwed out of health and into vanity, but a real, honest, old-fashioned boarding-school, where a reasonable quantity of accomplishments were sold at a reasonable price, and where girls might be sent to be out of the way, and scramble themselves into a little education, without any danger of coming back prodigies. Mrs. Goddard's school was in high repute, and very deservedly ; she had an ample house and garden, gave the children plenty of wholesome food, let them run about a great deal in the summer, and in winter dressed their chilblains with her own hands.

It was no wonder that a train of twenty young couple now walked after her to church.

In *Emma* we read most about governesses, schools and education generally. Jane Fairfax was destined to be a governess ; she talks with sadly mature bitterness of the governess trade :

“ I did not mean, I was not thinking of, the slave-trade,” replied Jane ; “ governess-trade, I assure you, was all that I had in view—widely different certainly as to the guilt of those who carry it on, but as to the greater misery of the victims, I do not know where it lies. But I only mean to say that there are advertising offices, and that by applying to them I should have no doubt of very soon meeting with something that would do.”

Mrs. Elton replies :

“ With your superior talents, you have a right to move in the first circle. Your musical knowledge alone would entitle you to name your own terms, have as many rooms as you like, and mix in the family as much as you chose ; that is—I do not know—if you knew the harp, you might do all that, I am very sure ; but you sing as well as play. Yes, I really believe you might, even without the harp, stipulate for what you chose.”

At the same dinner-party, Mr. John Knightley observes :

“ I have heard it asserted . . . that the same sort of handwriting often prevails in a family ; and where the same master teaches, it is natural enough. But for that reason I should imagine the likeness must be chiefly confined to the females, for boys have very little teaching after an early age, and scramble into any hand they can get.”

Presently Emma herself says :

“ Mr. Frank Churchill writes one of the best gentleman’s hands I ever saw.”

“ I do not admire it,” said Mr. Knightley. “ It is like a woman’s writing.”

I wish I could remember now whether this was the point, on reading *Emma* for the first time, that I began to suspect not only that she was beloved by Mr. Knightley, but that he was frantically jealous of Frank Churchill, and never let an occasion pass without expressing it.

(Of governesses, Jane Austen has much to tell us ; but though she frequently mentions masters, she never once leaves us a single portrait of any of these, nor lets them play a part in the action of the novels ; they come and go until the young ladies, the Bertrams, the Bennets, the Dashwoods, the Woodhouses, have had their minds sufficiently

improved, and then we hear no more about them ; in Victorian novels a little later, young ladies pined and sighed their bloom away for love of the drawing-master, the Italian master, the music-master ; still later, they were prone to elope with the handsome chauffeur ; finally, in our own time, we saw them infatuated with shadows on celluloid : " Mad about the boy ". But the masters in Jane Austen's books must have lacked romantic attraction, and their influence on their pupils' minds was absolutely non-existent ; perhaps because the governess always sat in the room ; but then the Bennets had no governess, we are told this expressly, when Elizabeth defends her father's ideas on education against the impertinent enquiries of Lady Catherine :

" . . . Do your sisters play and sing ? "

" One of them does. "

" Why did not you all learn ? You ought all to have learned. The Miss Webbs all play, and their father has not so good an income as yours. Do you draw ? "

" No, not at all. "

" What, none of you ? "

" Not one. "

" That is very strange. But I suppose you had no opportunity. Your mother should have taken you to town every spring for the benefit of masters. "

" My mother would have had no objection, but my father hates London. "

" Has your governess left you ? "

" We never had any governess. "

" No governess ! How was that possible ? Five daughters brought up at home without a governess. I never heard of such a thing. "

One of the sweetest characters in the long gallery of Jane Austen's women is Emma's governess, Miss Taylor, who at the very start of the book marries Mr. Weston and goes to live at Randalls. She was a beloved friend of the Woodhouse family as well as their governess ; and though she only goes to live half a mile away and we rejoice to meet her in almost every chapter, we can agree with Emma that " the want of Miss Taylor would be felt every hour of every day ", and are almost inclined to sympathise with Mr. Woodhouse's doleful argument : " A house of her own ! But where is the advantage of a house of her own ? This is three times as large. "

" Poor Miss Taylor ", as Mr. Woodhouse persists in calling her in spite of Emma's efforts to lift his spirits away from poor Miss Taylor's

terrible fate, remains, however, the only governess in the Jane Austen books to be given, so to speak, such a good press ; warm enough, certainly, to convince us that the author cannot have a prejudice against the race. Miss Lee, governess at Mansfield Park, appears occasionally, but by her behaviour to Fanny Price we have an idea that she was of a sycophantic disposition ; she does not seem to have helped to make the little waif feel at home and happy, on first arriving to live with her rich cousins :

“ Dear mamma, only think, my cousin cannot put the map of Europe together—or my cousin cannot tell the principal rivers in Russia—or she never heard of Asia Minor—or she does not know the difference between water-colours and crayons ! How strange ! Did you ever hear anything so stupid ? ”

“ My dear,” their considerate aunt would reply, “ it is very bad, but you must not expect everybody to be as forward and quick at learning as yourself . . . for, much as you know already, there is a great deal more for you to learn.”

“ Yes, I know there is, till I am seventeen.”

This remark, from Miss Maria Bertram, contains one of Jane Austen’s happiest asides. If we link it with another remark, from *Northanger Abbey*, describing the mind of her young heroine Catherine : “ about as ignorant and uninformed as the female mind at seventeen usually is ”, we can be perfectly certain that Miss Austen was relieving herself of a good deal of suppressed impatience with the intolerance and vanity of early youth ; if we want to know more about it, we have only to read any outburst of Marianne Dashwood, in which enthusiasm and foolishness are equally blended :

“ O mamma ! how spiritless, how tame was Edward’s manner in reading to us last night ! . . . I could hardly keep my seat. To hear those beautiful lines which have frequently almost driven me wild, pronounced with such impenetrable calmness, such dreadful indifference ! ”

“ He would certainly have done more justice to simple and elegant prose. I thought so at the time ; but you *would* give him Cowper.”

“ Nay, mamma, if he is not to be animated by Cowper !——”

Mrs. Dashwood was not a particularly wise woman, though loving and cheerful in adversity, and generously anxious that her daughters should have every happiness procurable, even though she herself was not to share in it ; a rare virtue in mothers. Yet she must have known enough to supervise their education, because when she sent them up on a visit to London, she says :

"I am delighted with the plan . . . it is exactly what I could wish. Margaret and I shall be as much benefited by it as yourselves. When you and the Middletons are gone, we shall go on so quietly and happily together with our books and our music ! You will find Margaret so improved when you come back again ! And I have a little plan of alteration for your bedroom too, which may now be performed without inconvenience to any one."

(It is sad that by the drama of Willoughby's faithless behaviour and Marianne's subsequent illness, this "little plan of alteration" must have been driven right out of Miss Austen's head ; for we never hear any more of it ; I have a notion that by the time Mrs. Dashwood's two daughters arrived home again, their bedrooms were practically uninhabitable, though they affectionately said nothing about it.)

To the education of her daughters, Lady Bertram paid not the smallest attention . . . As for Fanny's being stupid at learning, "she could only say it was very unlucky, but some people *were* stupid, and Fanny must take more pains".

Mrs. Morland, "a woman of plain sense", in every way Lady Bertram's opposite, certainly attended herself to the education of her ten children :

Her mother was three months in teaching her only to repeat the "Beggar's Petition", and, after all, her next sister Sally could say it better than she did. Not that Catherine was always stupid ; by no means ; she learnt the fable of "The Hare and many Friends", as quickly as any girl in England. Her mother wished her to learn music ; and Catherine was sure she should like it, for she was very fond of tinkling the keys of the old forlorn spinet, so at eight years old she began. She learnt for a year and could not bear it ; and Mrs. Morland, who did not insist on her daughters being accomplished in spite of incapacity or distaste, allowed her to leave off. The day which dismissed the music-master was one of the happiest of Catherine's life.

When Catherine Morland begins to read, we are supplied with a Jane's-eye view of what all young heroines were supposed to be reading in the late eighteenth century : "those quotations which are so serviceable and so soothing in the vicissitudes of their eventful lives" . . . Pope, Gray, Thomson and Shakespeare—as well as the novels of Mrs. Radcliffe. How we delight in Miss Austen in that special mood of mocking at contemporary orthodoxy.

Mary Crawford, in a lively discourse about when a girl can be said



to be out and when she is still in, surprised us by her opinion that girls should be :

“quiet and modest . . . one does not like to see a girl of eighteen or nineteen so immediately up to everything.”)

And capping anecdotes with Tom Bertram, goes on to a final pronouncement on all precocious younger sisters :

“Miss Augusta should have been with her governess.”

(Yet it appears that though mothers, governesses and masters perform their share in the education of their daughters, a great deal is still left to voluntary reading.) But before we start investigating this, let us slip in Harriet’s account of an evening with the Martin family :

“sometimes of an evening, before we went to cards, he would read something aloud out of the ‘Elegant Extracts’, very entertaining.”

Nothing could be more damning to most of us, if we were honest as to our intentions and their subsequent fulfilment, than Mr. Knightley’s dry reply when Mrs. Weston defends Emma’s friendship with Harriet :

“Emma has been meaning to read more ever since she was twelve years old. I have seen a great many lists of her drawing up at various times of books that she meant to read regularly through ; and very good lists they were, very well chosen, and very neatly arranged—sometimes alphabetically, and sometimes by some other rule. . . . But I have done with expecting any course of steady reading from Emma. She will never submit to anything requiring industry and patience, and a subjection of the fancy to the understanding.”

His appraisal is cool for a lover, but it is just ; if we go through her accomplishments steadily, reading, music, drawing, we shall find it true of Emma what she says herself in one of those engaging moments of honesty :

“The truth is, Harriet, that my playing is just good enough to be praised, but Jane Fairfax’s is much beyond it. . . . My playing is no more like hers than a lamp is like sunshine.”

We have already discovered that Mrs. Morland has such sense as not to make her young Catherine keep on banging at the piano when she has no natural gift for it. Mary Bennet earned the reputation, by assiduous practice and highbrow tastes, as a notable performer, but the first thing we always remember about it is her father’s snub when she keeps on too long at the Netherfield ball : “That will do extremely well, child. You have delighted us long enough. Let the other young ladies have time to exhibit.” Mary, it is true, was an exhibitionist ; her music can have given little pleasure to others. Of Elizabeth’s talent we

hear when she visits Rosings : " Miss Bennet would not play at all amiss if she practised more, and could have the advantage of a London master. She has a very good notion of fingering." And Elizabeth confesses : " My fingers . . . do not move over this instrument in the masterly manner which I see so many women's do. They have not the same force or rapidity, and do not produce the same expression. But then I have always supposed it to be my own fault—because I would not take the trouble of practising."

Marianne was for ever at the piano, playing and singing ; and Colonel Brandon was enraptured, though nobody else in Sir John Middleton's house took the trouble to listen with any attention. ( Mary Crawford will always be associated with the harp :

A young woman, pretty, lively, with a harp as elegant as herself, and both placed near a window, cut down to the ground, and opening on to a little lawn, surrounded by shrubs in the rich foliage of summer, was enough to catch any man's heart.

Henrietta and Louisa had been to school in Exeter. Louisa says one evening :

" . . . I am come to give you notice, that papa and mamma are out of spirits this evening, especially mamma ; she is thinking so much of poor Richard ! And we agreed it would be best to have the harp, for it seems to amuse her more than the piano-forte."

Both sisters were wild for dancing, and Anne Elliot used to play country dances to them by the hour together.

She played a great deal better than either of the Miss Musgroves, but having no voice, no knowledge of the harp, and no fond parents to sit by and fancy themselves delighted, her performance was little thought of, only out of civility, or to refresh the others, as she was well aware.

Anne would never have been a showy performer in anything. That she read deeply and gave herself great happiness by her reading, we know from the books she recommended to Captain Benwick, to help him recover from the pain of a broken heart. )

( " . . . having talked of poetry, the richness of the present age, and gone through a brief comparison of opinion as to the first-rate poets, trying to ascertain whether *Marmion* or *The Lady of the Lake* were to be preferred, and how ranked the *Giaour* and *The Bride of Abydos*, and moreover, how the *Giaour* was to be pronounced . . . she ventured to recommend a larger allowance of prose in his daily study . . .

When the evening was over, Anne could not but be amused at

the idea of her coming to Lyme to preach patience and resignation to a young man whom she had never seen before ; nor could she help fearing, on more serious reflection, that, like many other great moralists and preachers, she had been eloquent on a point in which her own conduct would ill bear examination.”)

This delicately ironic self-communion is in the same spirit as Elinor Dashwood when she drinks the glass of fine old Constantia wine for the colicky gout which Mrs. Jennings brought to heal Marianne’s broken heart :

Elinor, as she swallowed the chief of it, reflected that, though its good effects on a colicky gout were at present of little importance to her, its healing powers on a disappointed heart might be as reasonably tried on herself as on her sister.

✓ For the more sensible of her heroines are able to find much pleasure and sustenance in their wry reflections, without needing to be for ever talking about them. ✓ How strange it is that Anne can still manage not to be a prig ; for a moment we are afraid in case we might love her less, but half a page further down, that chapter ends with a revelation of a very human girl indeed, and we draw a breath of relief. Anne is safe with us as Fanny will never be safe. She lives a very solitary life, with a father and sister so out of sympathy with the bend of her own mind. And though Elinor Dashwood is tenderly fond of her mother and Marianne, their waywardness of thought, their extravagance of opinion, must leave her plenty of opportunity to be sensible all by herself. For Jane Austen elevates the quality of sense to a place in the sun ; to her, it is not merely a minor virtue, and carries no reproach of dullness along with it.) Clifton Fadiman says in one of his reviews :

“ Whatever the cause, a novel both imaginative and sensible is hard to come by.

✓ “ Good sense at any time is not too familiar in fiction. Indeed, its appearance often strikes us as something almost bizarre, and then we call it wit. The wittiest of English novelists (I mean Jane Austen) compels our admiration not through epigram or paradox but simply by the exact justice of her comment on ordinary human nature.) It is wrong to call this comment clever. Is there not something a little irrelevant about cleverness, astounding us as it does by the brilliant originality with which it just barely misses the point ? And is not Jane Austen always relevant, always sensible ? ”)

(Nowadays when we say : “ It doesn’t make sense,” we are reverting half-unconsciously to Miss Austen’s estimate of the value of making sense ; certainly in her case, it does not also indicate any lack of talent

for making nonsense ; she is a wonderful nonsense-maker ; all sensible minds are. I dare say, however, that to her, "making sense" might almost have meant the creation of a working religion ; clarity and balance brought as near perfection as human limitation will allow ; where the mind is wild and turgid, blown about by the wind of emotion, bent this way and that by the views of the outer world, then sense is absent ; for sense as Anne has it and Elinor (though in the latter case with some forfeit of enchantment) is like the water in one of the caves of a rocky sea, deep and still and pellucid. It is not always Jane Austen's quieter heroines who possessed this rare gift ; Elizabeth Bennet had it : her judgments are clear, and her spiritual compass has a reliable swing, though she is still so young. E. M. Forster, who among contemporary novelists does, I think, approach most nearly to Jane Austen both in outlook and matter, lets old Mr. Emerson say to Lucy (in *A Room with a View*) : "My dear, I fear you are in a muddle." Lucy deserves this ; she has allowed herself to be swayed all ways by the conventions of her day and the opinions of her friends and relations. Elizabeth Bennet, living nearly one hundred years earlier, is not for one moment in a muddle ; not even when she believes Wickham's plausible account of himself, and backs him up indignantly against Darcy. Here she was wrong, plainly wrong, as Emma so often was, but being wrong is not to be in a muddle ; a heroine with sense can presently retrieve her self-respect by a bad half-hour, and then an honest confession. Elizabeth, though she is in fact singularly free from self-approval and self-righteousness, acts as she pleases and says what she pleases, within the natural limits of decorum and good taste ; and she can afford to do so because her humour, her clear perception, her sense, can be trusted to keep her from great silliness and its consequent penalties. She is confident, never complacent.

Sense cannot be wholly an inherited quality, for of all the mothers in Jane Austen, the mother of Elizabeth and Jane Bennet was the most foolish. Marianne also had a foolish mother ; so had the Bertrams, and Fanny Price ; as for Emma, she may have had an intelligent mother but made up for it by a father whose foolishness approached genius. However, Elizabeth was lucky in her father's mental ability : "Can he be a sensible man, sir ?" she asks of him when he has finished reading aloud Mr. Collins's letter of introduction. "No, my dear, I think not. I have great hopes of finding him the reverse." It may well be that Miss Austen herself shares this wicked pleasure with Mr. Bennet.

(We could build a small library from the scattered mention of books throughout Jane Austen's six novels : Fanny's books :

“ You in the meanwhile will be taking a trip into China, I suppose. How does Lord Macartney go on ? (opening a volume on the table and then taking up some others). And here are Crabbe’s Tales, and the Idler, at hand to relieve you, if you tire of your great book.”

Marianne’s favourites : Cowper and Scott and Thomson. Catherine and Isabella palpitating in unison over Udolpho and The Orphan of the Rhine. John Thorpe rejecting Camilla. Miss Andrews reading Sir Charles Grandison. Darcy would like to talk about books to Elizabeth, but she remains deliberately flippant, and teases his serious desires by her reply that she can never talk of books in a ball-room. We must not forget to include the book of Fordyce’s Sermons which Mr. Collins read aloud till rudely interrupted by Lydia’s yawns and bangs. Then there are all the plays discussed in *Mansfield Park* for the theatricals before they fixed on *Lovers’ Vows*. And *Children of the Abbey* and *Romance of the Forest*, which Harriet recommends so earnestly to her infatuated yeoman, Mr. Martin—he had read *The Vicar of Wakefield*).

After music and reading, drawing appears among the more serious accomplishments of the day. It is laid down for us that those who draw are not musical, and vice versa ; all except Emma, who actively engages herself in all branches of art and perfects herself in none ; we can easily fancy ourselves leaning over her shoulder as she goes through her portfolio of drawings before posing Harriet for her portrait.

Her many beginnings were displayed. Miniatures, half-lengths, whole-lengths, pencil, crayon, and water-colours had been all tried in turn. She had always wanted to do everything, and had made more progress both in drawing and music than many might have done with so little labour as she would ever submit to . . .

There was merit in every drawing—in the least finished perhaps the most.

(Miss Austen lets the accomplishments of her heroines help in the unwinding of the plot.) And Mrs. Ferrars’ icy reception of Elinor’s painted screens when they are handed round, provokes our sardonic pleasure in her fear of an ineligible daughter-in-law, when she has to learn within a chapter or two that Edward has already engaged himself to one even less eligible.

The painting of pretty little screens sounds a trivial accomplishment, not as solid as one might expect from Elinor Dashwood, yet it may be the screens were actually useful to hold up between the fire and the complexion and, as such, justified themselves. But we need not place the painting of fire-screens quite as low in the list as “wasting gold paper”, mentioned as a favourite holiday sport of the moment, in

*Mansfield Park* ; and we should remember that the walls of the Dashwood cottage at Barton were “ beautified by Elinor’s drawings and water-colours affixed to the walls of their sitting-room ”.

Except for Charlotte Palmer’s landscape in coloured silks, we are not told that young ladies of the period did much embroidery ; netting seemed to be more in favour, netting and carpet-work. Catherine Morland “ drew out her netting-box ” ; Isabella Thorpe mentions that Miss Andrews, “ a sweet girl, one of the sweetest in the world . . . is netting herself one of the sweetest cloaks you can conceive ”.

And Emma says to Harriet :

“ If I know myself, Harriet ” (which she does not, and the whole point of the book is to convince her of this), “ mine is an active, busy mind . . . and I do not perceive why I should be more in want of employment at forty or fifty than at one-and-twenty. Woman’s usual occupations of eye, and hand, and mind will be as open to me then as they are now, or with no important variation. If I draw less, I shall read more ; if I give up music, I shall take to carpet-work.”

(Knitting was an occasional occupation,) Jane Fairfax knits a pair of socks for her grandmother, and (Emma observes impatiently) one hears of nothing else for a month. And we would willingly part from a whole shelf of learned tomes rather than forfeit one word of that brilliant chapter which treats entirely of Harriet’s riddle-book :

The only literary pursuit which engaged Harriet at present, the only mental provision she was making for the evening of life, was the collecting and transcribing of all the riddles of every sort that she could meet with into a thin quarto of hot-pressed paper, made up by her friend, and ornamented with ciphers and trophies.

In this age of literature, such collections on a very grand scale are not uncommon. Miss Nash, head teacher at Mrs. Goddard’s, had written out at least three hundred.

Twice, if not three times, in these two sentences does the author flip us her own private opinion of such wasting of time.

(Georgiana apparently paints a pretty table) if we may judge from Miss Bingley’s raptures. Aunt Philips painted on china, one would imagine to set our teeth on edge. (For other sedentary occupations with which the young ladies amused themselves in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, we must assume that when they had finished with their letter-writing, their netting and carpet-work, their riddles and fire-screens and embroidery, and the shrubbery was still too damp for walking, and there was no ball that evening, it only remained for them

to sit down to their journal.) Henry Tilney is our authority for this belief.

There is no reason, however, why we should not now go out of doors and see how they divert themselves and retain the fine glow of their complexions ; for (it would be a mistake to suppose that the young ladies of Jane Austen's period passed much of their time indoors ; they were, in fact, extremely active, walking, driving and riding, especially walking.) True, Fanny Price easily gets tired ; so does Mrs. Gardiner, but she, no doubt, could be excused on venerable grounds ; her elder children were six and eight years old already, so it was quite possible that she might be over thirty (according to Marianne Dashwood, an age to set a female tottering on her last journey to the grave) and needed to lean lovingly on her husband's arm when they explored the ground of Pemberley. Near the *dénouement* of the book, towards the end, she writes to her niece Elizabeth : " I shall never be quite happy till I have been all round the park. A low phaeton with a nice little pair of ponies would be the very thing."

But Fanny Price—it is hard to understand quite what is the matter with Fanny's health, though all through *Mansfield Park* she is perpetually being told to rest, to keep her feet up, to go to bed before the others, to take a little careful exercise but not too much. William's final injunction to his mother was : " Take care of Fanny, mother, she is tender and not used to rough it like the rest of us." I do not think she is asthmatic, nor suffers from any biliary complaint, nor rheumatism of the joints ; nor is she consumptive ; my private opinion, which for once, if never again, coincides somewhat with the opinion of Aunt Norris, is that she is something of an exhibitionist, and enjoys especially to have Edmund looking after her and enquiring with solicitude how she has spent her day :

" You look tired and fagged, Fanny. You have been walking too far."

" No, I have not been out at all."

" Then you have had fatigues within doors, which are worse. You had better have gone out."

Fanny is for ever sitting down or wanting to sit down :

" Every sort of exercise fatigues her so soon, Miss Crawford, except riding."

Edmund gave her his own quiet mare that she should not suffer from lack of air and exercise, from too much confinement. She is sent out by Sir Thomas with particular instructions where and for how long she is to take exercise. Her Aunt Norris scolds her briskly later in the day.

"It would have made no difference to you, I suppose, whether you had walked in the shrubbery or gone to my house."

"I recommended the shrubbery to Fanny as the driest place," said Sir Thomas.

"Oh!" said Mrs. Norris, with a moment's check, "that was very kind of you, Sir Thomas, but you do not know how dry the path is to my house."

Certainly Fanny was not robust, and she manages to put it across with modest success. Henry Crawford offers to escort her for a walk in the dockyard at Portsmouth, and we wonder how soon it will be before she flags:

Fanny was most conveniently in want of rest. Crawford could not have wished her more fatigued or more ready to sit down; but he could have wished her sister away.

The next day was Sunday, and again they walk, the whole Price family and Henry Crawford as well, upon the ramparts:

Had she been without his arm, she would soon have known that she needed it, for she wanted strength for a two hours' saunter of this kind, coming, as it generally did, upon a week's previous inactivity. Fanny was beginning to feel the effect of being debarred from her usual regular exercise;

But we have girded enough at Fanny; I am no doubt being unfair to her. Elizabeth, Emma and Anne, Marianne and Catherine, are always ready for any amount of exercise; we see Elizabeth running across the fields for three miles to visit Jane, marooned at Netherfield with a bad cold: "crossing field after field at a quick pace, jumping over stiles and springing over puddles with impatient activity, and finding herself at last within a view of the house, with weary ankles, dirty stockings, and a face glowing with the warmth of exercise". Bingley's sister says:

"She has nothing, in short, to recommend her but being an excellent walker. . . ."

"... I am afraid, Mr. Darcy," observed Miss Bingley . . . "that this adventure has rather affected your admiration of her fine eyes."

"Not at all," he replied, "they were brightened by the exercise."

When the Dashwoods went to Barton they discovered: The whole country about them abounded in beautiful walks . . . They (Marianne and Margaret) gaily ascended the downs, rejoicing in their own penetration at every glimpse of blue sky . . .

"Margaret," said Marianne, "we will walk here at least two hours."



Except for Elizabeth's scamper across the fields, however, it was not considered right and proper for young girls to walk quite alone.) Emma is pleased therefore when she finds Harriet to replace Miss Taylor, at any rate as a companion in her walks, if not as an intellectual stimulus :

As a walking companion, Emma had very early foreseen how useful she might find her. In that respect Mrs. Weston's loss had been important. Her father never went beyond the shrubbery, where two divisions of the ground sufficed him for his long walk, or his short, as the year varied ; and since Mrs. Weston's marriage, her exercise had been too much confined. She had ventured once alone to Rاندalls, but it was not pleasant.

—(We are not told why, and conjecture perhaps becomes a little too freakish, so it had better be left alone).

Jane Fairfax walks daily to the Post Office to fetch the letters ; we know her secret ; she is expecting to hear from Frank Churchill ; but she is scolded by Mr. John Knightley, Mrs. Elton and most sweetly by Mr. Woodhouse for her rashness in adventuring out in wet weather :

“ I am very sorry to hear, Miss Fairfax, of your being out this morning in the rain. Young ladies should take care of themselves. Young ladies are delicate plants.”

Catherine Morland almost weeps with disappointment when, having arranged for a long country walk with the Tilneys outside Bath, she is first prevented by the rain and then by the deceitfulness of John Thorpe who delivered the wrong message and took her driving instead. However, the delight was only postponed, and presently Catherine found herself walking with Henry and Eleanor Tilney round Beechen Cliff, blissfully happy and, we can be sure, ready to walk for hours and to listen to him for years. (The walk, however, which I prefer to read about of all others, is in *Persuasion* :

It was a very fine November day, and the Miss Musgroves came through the little grounds, and stopped for no other purpose than to say, that they were going to take a *long* walk, and therefore concluded Mary could not like to go with them ; and when Mary immediately replied, with some jealousy at not being supposed a good walker, “ Oh, yes ! I should like to join you very much, I am very fond of a long walk ; ” Anne felt persuaded by the looks of the two girls, that it was precisely what they did not wish.

The walk was not irrelevant, but an integral part of the structure of the love story of Anne Elliot and Frederick Wentworth. Mary

snobbishly refuses to visit her Aunt Hayter, and waits at the top of the hill with Anne to keep her company, while Charles and Henrietta run down for a few minutes to see their lowly-born aunt and cousins.

Mary sat down for a moment, but it would not do ; she was sure Louisa had found a better seat somewhere else, and she would go on till she overtook her.

Anne, really tired herself, was glad to sit down ; and she very soon heard Captain Wentworth and Louisa in the hedge-row behind her, as if making their way back along the rough, wild sort of channel, down the centre. They were speaking as they drew near . . .

Poor Anne, she hears enough for all her agitation to be forgiven. Admiral Croft and his wife drive along in their gig and " Upon hearing how long a walk the young people had engaged in, they kindly offered a seat to any lady who might be particularly tired ". We can be positive that Anne had not said a word, and it was left to Frederick's chivalry to arrange the matter, yet we are glad on her behalf that she is not obliged to walk all that long way home again, courageously bearing her burden of thought. At Lyme Regis, later on, she is feeling remarkably well, and enjoys her walks before breakfast, and along the Cobb ; where we have to wonder, as everyone who has read *Persuasion* must have wondered, why Captain Wentworth had not enough sense to give an absolute refusal, as Mr. Knightley would surely have done, to Louisa Musgrove's imperious wish :

In all their walks he had had to jump her from the stiles ; the sensation was delightful to her. The hardness of the pavement for her feet made him less willing upon the present occasion ; he did it however. She was safely down, and instantly to show her enjoyment, ran up the steps to be jumped down again. He advised her against it, thought the jar too great ; but no, he reasoned and talked in vain, she smiled and said, " I am determined I will : " he put out his hands ; she was too precipitate by half a second, she fell on the pavement on the Lower Cobb, and was taken up lifeless.

Anne Elliot apparently does not ride, or if she does, we hear nothing of it. ) Fanny Price, though she had a bad seat on a horse, at least preferred it to walking.

Miss Crawford's enjoyment of riding was such, that she did not know how to leave off. Active and fearless, and, though rather small, strongly made, she seemed formed for a horsewoman ; and to the pure genuine pleasure of the exercise, something was probably added in Edmund's attendance and instructions.

One cannot help sympathizing with Fanny over this episode, especially

when the praise of her rival's horsemanship was so tactlessly emphasised by the old coachman.

"It is a pleasure to see a lady with such a good heart for riding!" said he. "I never see one sit a horse better. She did not seem to have a thought of fear. Very different from you, miss, when you first began, six years ago come next Easter. Lord bless you! how you did tremble when Sir Thomas first had you put on!"

Curious how someone is always handy with remarks like these to help us through life's blackest hours!

[Apparently it was not the thing for young ladies to accept such a valuable present as a mare from ardent young gentlemen, even their cousins; Fanny's mare was nominally Edmund's, and only lent to her; and when Marianne Dashwood in a youthful rapture tells Elinor that Willoughby had given her a horse, Elinor can only persuade her impulsive sister to refuse the gift by dwelling on the inconvenience to their mother: "that if she were to alter her resolution in favour of this gift, she must buy another for the servant, and keep a servant to ride it, and after all, build a stable to receive them". Most unwilling was Marianne to renounce "the delight of a gallop on some of these downs . . . As to an additional servant, the expense would be a trifle; mama, she was sure, would never object to it; and any horse would do for *him*; he might always get one at the Park; as to a stable, the merest shed would be sufficient. Elinor then ventured to doubt the propriety of her receiving such a present from a man so little, or at least so lately known to her."

That Jane Bennet rides, we know; for her match-making mother sends her on horseback to visit the Bingleys at Netherfield when rain was threatening, in the hope that they would keep her there all night and thus give the eligible Mr. Bingley further chances to fall in love with her.

"I had much rather go in the coach."

"But my dear, your father cannot spare the horses, I am sure. They are wanted in the farm, Mr. Bennet, are not they?"

"They are wanted in the farm much oftener than I can get them."

"But if you have got them to-day," said Elizabeth, "my mother's purpose will be answered."

It can only have been Jane Bennet who had a horse for her own riding; Elizabeth did not care to ride, though she did not mind running three miles across the muddy fields on hearing of Jane's feverish cold.

We find only one bare mention of riding in *Emma*: Frank Churchill asks her if she is a horsewoman; we do not hear her reply; but in her case it could have been no question of being prevented, as was perhaps

our youngest heroine, Catherine Morland, by a father's insufficiency of means and a large family. It is not difficult, however, to imagine that Mr. Woodhouse's nerves would not permit his beloved daughter to indulge in the dangerous exercise ; a thousand fears a minute must have presented themselves to him, if indeed the question had ever cropped up. We must remember that even when old James the coachman was driving Emma to the Coles', her father did not "above half like" the corner into Vicarage Lane :

"She was welcomed with the utmost delight by her father, who had been trembling for the dangers of a solitary drive from Vicarage Lane—turning a corner which he could never bear to think of, and in strange hands—a mere coachman—no James."

Mr. Woodhouse's fears, if extended to driving as well as riding, would also have kept Emma from the coveted box-seat beside the gentleman, driving his own barouche or curricule. Maria and Julia Bertram fight almost too openly when it is a question who should sit up there next to Mr. Crawford on the Sotherton expedition :

"There is no hardship, I suppose, nothing unpleasant," said Edmund, "in going on the barouche box."

"Unpleasant !" cried Maria : "oh dear ! I believe it would be generally thought the favourite seat. There can be no comparison as to one's view of the country."

And Catherine Morland was of the same opinion :

A very short trial convinced her that a curricule was the prettiest equipage in the world. . . . Henry drove so well, so quietly, without making any disturbance, without parading to her, or swearing at them. . . . To be driven by him, next to being dancing with him, was certainly the greatest happiness in the world.

Her reactions, however, were very different when she was driven by John Thorpe. Any quotation from John Thorpe's conversation would be enough to explain her discomfort, for Mr. Thorpe was one of those characters known then as a rattle : a term which might well have survived, for they exist unquenchably in every age. Listen to Mr. Thorpe on the subject of the gig belonging to Catherine's brother James :

"Oh, lord ! Did you ever see such a little tittuppy thing in your life ? There is not a sound piece of iron about it. The wheels have been fairly worn out these ten years at least ; and as for the body, upon my soul, you might shake it to pieces yourself with a touch. It is the most devilish little rickety business I ever beheld ! Thank God ! we have got a better. I would not be bound to go two miles in it for fifty thousand pounds."

John Thorpe was no better in the ball-room than on the box-seat.

"Well, Miss Morland, I suppose you and I are to stand up and jig it together again?"

"Oh, no. I am much obliged to you, our two dances are over."

(Dances, apparently, in the ballrooms of Jane Austen and her period, were always booked in twos; Sheila Kaye-Smith tells me that this did not mean two entirely separate dances with the same partner, but once down the set and work their way up again; and then the whole thing repeated.) Catherine frequently stands up with Mr. Tilney for two dances, and finds them far too short; and Isabella resists James Morland's entreaty that she will grant him another two, with, "it would make us the talk of the place if we were not to change partners". Isabella had pretended always to be anxious that she and her sweetest friend Catherine should be in the same set, until the dashing Frederick Tilney appears in the assembly-rooms to cut out the quieter pretensions of James Morland. Catherine was indeed astonished, for she had previously heard Frederick Tilney disdaining to find a partner worthy of himself in the public assembly-rooms at Bath, in the same haughty style as Mr. Darcy excuses himself from dancing at the assembly where he was first to be struck by Elizabeth's fine eyes:

"You had much better dance."

"I certainly shall not. You know how I detest it, unless I am particularly acquainted with my partner. At such an assembly as this it would be insupportable. . . ."

He looked for a moment at Elizabeth, till, catching her eye, he withdrew his own, and coldly said, "She is tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt *me*; and I am in no humour at present to give consequence to young ladies who are slighted by other men."

Presently, however, we have a ball at Netherfield itself. Miss Bingley says:

"I am much mistaken if there are not some among us to whom a ball would be rather a punishment than a pleasure."

"If you mean Darcy," cried her brother, "he may go to bed, if he chooses, before it begins; but as for the ball, it is quite a settled thing, and as soon as Nicholls has made white soup enough, I shall send round my cards."

There has been quite a discussion as to the meaning of "white soup" in the present context. I was inclined for some time to take it at its face value and imagine "white soup" to be indeed white soup: cream of chicken soup, perhaps; soup and negus to sustain Fanny Price when

Sir Thomas gently forced her into prominence at the Mansfield Park ball ; soup praised by Miss Bates, served first at supper during the ball at the Crown ; and in *The Watsons*, on their way to the ball, the elder sister remarks to Emma Watson, apropos of the friends' house where she is to spend the night : " You will be sure of some comfortable soup," as though that were an important reassurance. In Lady Napier's Recipe Book, dated 1750, we find a recipe for White Soup, headed, " From Lady Clermont : Boil down a knuckle of veal, a little celery," and so forth, and " add as much cream as will make it white. Beat the yolks of six eggs and add them to the cream very hot and stir all one way that it may not curdle and be careful not to put too much cream." Yet someone versed in the allusions of that period, informed me that " white soup " was the term then used for the mixture of flour and water with which the footmen plastered their hair. Bingley might have been slightly more likely to think of footmen than refreshments. But when Kate Nickleby went to see Mrs. Wititterly : " The door was opened by a big footman with his head floured, or chalked, or painted in some way (it didn't look like genuine powder)." One would imagine that Dickens would have known the phrase " white soup " for footmen's hair, had it been in common use forty-three years later.

The Netherfield ball was a prospect extremely agreeable to every female of the Bennet family, and even Mr. Collins delivers himself of a few unimpeachable views on the subject of dancing :

" I am by no means of opinion, I assure you," said he, " that a ball of this kind, given by a young man of character, to respectable people, can have any evil tendency."

(Dancing in a set must have offered plenty of opportunity for conversation.) Tilney talks nonsense to Catherine and mimics the conventional formula with which the young gentlemen of the day entertain their partners. And Elizabeth rallies Darcy in the same fashion. The ball at Mansfield Park is memorable to us, as to Fanny, by the astounding fact that she herself was selected by her uncle to open it :

She found herself the next moment conducted by Mr. Crawford to the top of the room, and standing there to be joined by the rest of the dancers, couple after couple as they were formed.

She could hardly believe it. To be placed above so many elegant young women ! The distinction was too great.

But it is, after all, the dancing in *Emma* which I remember with the deepest pleasure. First the impromptu dance at the Coles', where not more than five couple could be mustered :

Mrs. Weston, capital in her country dances, was seated, and beginning an irresistible waltz ; and Frank Churchill, coming up with most becoming gallantry to Emma, had secured her hand and led her up to the top.

Apparently they waltzed in a set, as in my youth we waltzed in a figure of the lancers. At the big ball, the ball at the Crown given by the Westons and so dreaded by Mr. Woodhouse lest there should be draughts when the overheated couples had to pass along a short corridor from the ballroom to the supper room, at this ball occur two of the most significant incidents in the book ; the first where Mr. Knightley rescues humble little Harriet Smith from the slights and insults which the Eltons were putting upon her, and the second, a consequence of Emma's pleasure at his chivalry :

Harriet would have seemed almost too lucky, if it had not been for the cruel state of things before . . . she bounded higher than ever, flew farther down the middle, and was in a continual course of smiles.

After supper Emma's eyes invite him irresistibly to come to her and be thanked :

" Whom are you going to dance with ? " asked Mr. Knightley.

She hesitated a moment, and then replied, " With you, if you will ask me."

" Will you ? " said he, offering his hand.

" Indeed I will. You have shown that you can dance, and you know we are not really so much brother and sister as to make it at all improper."

" Brother and sister ! No indeed."

. . . Which ought to have shown her, then if ever, by his eyes, his voice, that he desired to be her husband. But Emma dwelt so confidently in the charmed ring of her own matrimonial plans for others, most of them foolish and all of them improbable, that perhaps it is, after all, no wonder that she does not guess until she is thrust into the anguish of believing Mr. Knightley cares for someone else.

A mistress of English literature in one of our modern schools told me recently that among her older pupils, Emma was the least popular of Miss Austen's heroines ; the girls all exclaim in disgust : " She's such a snob ! " There is no argument against that ; Emma is a snob ; and if we try to persuade them : " but she's a delicious snob ", a blankness steals upon the air ; for in your ' teens you are almost bound to have a sternly uncompromising attitude towards life, and the adjective " delicious " is incompatible when linked with " snob ".

Anyhow, one must not take refuge in an adjective. What exactly

do I mean by my statement that Emma is a delicious snob? Probably that snobbery can be condoned and even enjoyed when the author is herself on your side, knows all about it and is, indeed, using this very snobbery as her theme: this deliciously youthful assumption of Miss Woodhouse that at the age of nearly twenty-one she knew everything, could prove all hearts, arrange suitable marriages and destroy marriages that she deemed unsuitable, guide and instruct Harriet, be saucy to Mr. Knightley, and generally behave for the first half of the book in a fashion which takes the whole of the second half of the book to undo, disprove and learn again. Jane Austen was nearing forty when she wrote *Emma*; she could look back on youth, tolerant towards its intolerance, its impetuosity, its glorious sweeping assumptions. She knows well that Emma is a snob, but a snob to be forgiven; a snob who will fall into mistakes, yet later learn of her mistakes, confess them and begin again more soberly. That is the lesson of the book. But you cannot expect a schoolgirl to treat Emma's over-confident remarks and instructions with the same forgiveness; youth will bang down the book and declare that Emma is impossible, awful; youth will pick up the book again and in scornful tones read aloud that passage, perhaps, where Emma holds forth to Harriet against the pretentious Mr. Martin, a mere farmer:

"I have no doubt of his being a very respectable young man. I know, indeed, that he is so; and, as such, wish him well . . . Six years hence, if he could meet with a good sort of young woman in the same rank as his own, with a little money, it might be very desirable . . . his sisters, from a superior education, are not to be altogether objected to, it does not follow that he might marry anybody at all fit for you to notice . . . I want to see you permanently well connected, and to that end it will be advisable to have as few odd acquaintance as may be."

If you cannot smile at this, not a superior smile, but loving Emma, touched by her girlhood and ignorance, if you cannot smile at it, then Emma is lost; and though the book can be read for the interest of its story, it will never be a favourite.

If you are old enough to smile at Emma and love her, then you can also love Marianne Dashwood (not so much, for her manners are bad), who, even younger, even more impetuous and over-confident and critical, more absurd in her judgments, is created in the same spirit, and lives to learn her own follies, repent of them and make amends. That is all very well as long as we can be sure, as we are perfectly sure in *Emma*, that Jane Austen is aware of snobbery and can stand aside from it, amused,



clear-sighted. Yet every now and then in her other books we have a twinge of doubt : *did* she always treat snobbery purely in the objective spirit, or were there moments when she was herself unaware that she subscribed to it ? When Elinor says of their projected visit to Mrs. Jennings's house in London : " she is not a woman whose society can afford us pleasure, or whose protection will give us consequence ", Miss Austen's own tones are frigid ; she does not smile at Elinor, she agrees with her. But *Sense and Sensibility* was written in 1791, and there was an even earlier version : *Elinor and Marianne*. Miss Austen then had still much to learn herself before she could see through Emma, tease her and make us love her, and leave her lovable to all readers who are old enough to understand the spirit in which she was conceived.

## CHAPTER IX

### *“Perfectly Compatible with the Profession of a Clergyman”*

SHEILA KAYE-SMITH

IN all the novels no single section of society displays the changes of fifty years more plainly than the clergy. We have only to compare Jane Austen's parsons with those of Fielding to realise how conditions have altered. Some of the difference of course is due to the outlook of the author. Jane was a clergyman's daughter and a clergyman's sister, and her outlook was that of the Parsonage, whereas Fielding's was not. But very much more than this is required to account for the gulf that yawns between Dr. Grant and Dr. Alexander, between Mr. Collins and Mr. Trulliber, between the Rev. Edmund Bertram and the Rev. Abraham Adams—to say nothing of that between Mrs. Slip-Slop (avowed a clergyman's daughter) and Jane Austen herself.

I have mentioned Fielding because he is nearly as lavish of clergy as Jane. (Indeed, it would be impossible to ignore the parson in any picture of eighteenth-century England, whether classic or Gothic. He was a node of country society, the only society then that really mattered, as integral a part of its structure as the Squire, and at the same time the guardian of religion and morality, even if in no more than a local sense.)

(But in Fielding's day his position was very much less socially secure than it was in Jane Austen's. The clergy in her novels are all genteel and on terms of equality with their landed neighbours—even Mr. Collins is no exception to this, as what makes him so ridiculous is that nothing in his situation really justifies his grovelling attitude to Lady Catherine de Bourgh. (In Fielding's novels, however, the clergy are either the hangers-on of great houses as chaplains and tutors, like Thwackum, or bumpkins like Trulliber—almost indistinguishable from his own hogs—or necessitous curates like Adams, who in spite of his learning lived in much the same style as a struggling artisan. Our visit to his family at the end of *Joseph Andrews* might be a visit to any working-man's home, and Mrs. Slip-Slop is not the only clergyman's daughter we find “in service”.

Certainly we cannot imagine any of the Fielding clergy, except

perhaps Dr. Alexander, being invited to make up her ladyship's pool of quadrille at Rosings. Nor can we easily picture them in conversation even with those two wearers of their own cloth—Edmund Bertram and Henry Tilney. (They belong to a different order—they are of the people, and their children are bred up as servants and inferiors. It is a big jump from their homes to the elegance of Mansfield and Thornton Lacey, or even to the modest comfort of Mr. Collins's "humble abode". Something must have happened to alter the situation.)

(Actually two things have happened—two very different things which have combined in a remarkable manner—the Evangelical Revival and the rise of a new professional class.)

(Up till the middle of the eighteenth century there are for all practical purposes only two social divisions in England—the classes and the masses. There is no professional middle class in the modern sense of the term; for the professions are split down the centre, their upper ranks grouping with the gentry, their lower ranks absorbed in the masses or on a footing with trade. It is a division which we still accept—or accepted up to a short time ago—in the case of the army and the navy, but in the eighteenth century it ran through all the professions. In the case of the clergy, the bishops lived luxuriously in their palaces and town houses, while the younger sons of great families often held in plurality a number of benefices, of which they saw little save the emoluments. It was only the lower, working ranks who lived in hovels on a labourer's wages, sometimes with little more than a labourer's position in society.)

(Such a state of affairs must be the first to yield to any quickening of the nation's religious consciousness, and such a quickening was already at hand. The Evangelical Revival, under the leadership of Whitefield and the two Wesleys, had much the same effect upon the Established Church as the Romantic Revival had upon art and literature. In many ways it was curiously like it, for it subjected reason to emotion, formalism to imagination, and if not actually romantic, found a good substitute for romance in the newly discovered virtue of "enthusiasm". One might also see a psychological parallel between the more lurid teaching of Wesley and his disciples on hell and the Horrid Mysteries of Mrs. Radcliffe and her imitators.)

(The Evangelical Movement had swept through the Church of England and out at the other end before Jane Austen was grown up. But fifty years of its struggles and controversies could not fail to leave their mark, and even the most fossilised church circles showed signs of its influence. Such abuses as non-residence and the traffic in livings had become the exception rather than the rule, and there was conse-

quently an improvement in clerical standards both spiritual and temporal. In all Jane's gallery of clerics there is only Henry Tilney who does not live in his parsonage, and even he is constantly riding over to Woodston on parish affairs, and on two occasions "the engagements of his curate" and the need to prepare a fine dinner for his father, respectively demand his presence on a Sunday. In *Mansfield Park*, it is true, something of a potter is made of Edmund's going to live at Thornton Lacey, but that is mostly due to the emotions roused in Fanny and Mary by the prospect of his departure. Mr. Collins, before coming to stay at Longbourn, is careful to explain that his august patron "is far from objecting to my occasional absence on a Sunday, provided that some other clergyman is engaged to do the duty". And again, (in *Persuasion*, Henrietta Musgrove has to find a number of excuses in ill-health and old age before she can indulge in her dream of Dr. Shirley's retiring from the duties of Uppercross and engaging Charles Hayter as his curate and substitute.)

(Charles Hayter, though we know he was regarded as socially impossible by Mary Musgrove, was no Parson Adams, living in squalor. The hack clergyman doubtless still survived in certain places, but he was sufficiently rare for Jane Austen to be able to ignore him. He had owed his existence to abuses, and as these decreased there was a corresponding increase in the social status of the clerical rank and file. The Evangelical Revival, by demanding something more of an incumbent than the absorption of tithe, detached the younger sons from their Parks and Places, and the gulf between the "upper" and "lower" ranks disappeared, as all became welded into a single professional class.)

(So we have the situation of a purely social change resulting from a purely religious movement. I doubt, however, if the Evangelical Revival did more than expedite the emergence of a professional middle class. The crumbling of the Augustan age with its vested interests in culture and education, the opening up of the East with all its offers and opportunities to "trade", would inevitably sooner or later have brought emancipation to that suppressed "middle" which had been confined for so long between the devil of the landed gentry and the deep sea of the landless workers. But it was probably the Evangelical Movement which decided that the first profession to emerge and consolidate itself should be the clergy.)

[Without it, perhaps, the pioneer might have been the law—fusing in a common gentility its higher practitioners and such hitherto despised beings as Uncle Philips or that equally deplorable uncle of Mrs. Elton, who was said to be "something in the law line". Or it might have been medicine, which in Jane Austen's time was not a profession at all, but a trade, the surgeon and the apothecary being only one step removed

from the barber and the drug-seller of their origins. No medical man in the novels, be he never so useful or never so beloved, like Mr. Perry, has the smallest position in society, and judging from the list given by Mary Crawford in *Mansfield Park*, the medical profession was not a possible alternative even to the Church for a younger son.

In Jane Austen's time the Church was the only consolidated professional class, the forerunner of that vast middle-class invasion which has since absorbed the entire population from the proletariat to the aristocracy, except for a few independent eccentrics at either end. Jane Austen herself was of it—one of the first genuine middle-class writers in England—and we can detect the middle-class attitude in many of her approaches to society.

✓ (Never was any novelist so exclusive. For her the "lower orders" scarcely exist, and nowhere do we find a servant or inferior allowed to play a real part in the story.) I had thought, when we planned this book, of writing on the subject of Jane Austen's servants, but found myself defeated by lack of material. With the doubtful exception of Rebecca in *Mansfield Park*, they have no personalities, only names and functions—Baddeley, Sir Thomas's butler; and Mrs. Chapman, Lady Bertram's own woman, at the Park; Patty, maid-of-all-work at Mrs. Bates's; Hill the house-keeper at Mrs. Bennet's; and Wright at Mrs. Elton's; also a number who have not even names but are only "the maid" who curled Emma's hair, or lit Catherine's fire, or had the third seat in General Tilney's coach. In only one instance is a servant allowed to be any sort of link in the story, and that is when Mrs. Dashwood's man Thomas precipitates a crisis by telling the family that he has just met Mr. and Mrs. Edward Ferrars.

Here another comparison with Fielding is inevitable, for Fielding's novels are full of servants and very entertaining they are. But Jane allows only her more vulgar characters to be on any sort of terms with their attendants—for instance, Mrs. Jennings, who took "comfort in the gossip of her maid for the loss of her two young companions", and Mrs. Price, whose mind was full of the iniquities of Rebecca. (None of her heroines seems to take the slightest personal interest in them,) though it is Fanny, the lowliest, who reaches the loftiest heights of detachment in her meeting with William at *Mansfield Park*—"She was with him as he entered the house and the first minutes of exquisite feeling had no interruption and no witnesses, unless the servants chiefly intent upon opening the proper doors could be counted as such."

This is all very far from the good old days, when servants were regarded as junior members of the family, and approaching the Victorian attitude of regarding them as suspect aliens. Much as I love Jane Austen,

I cannot altogether acquit her of snobbery, and snobbery of the peculiarly middle-class kind which consists in ignoring those below rather than toadying to those above. But to understand this we must realise that she herself belonged to a class which had only just succeeded in establishing itself completely in the social scheme, which was still, as it were, on preferment and therefore possibly still a prey to those social uncertainties of which snobbery is the outcome.

That she had an especial interest in the clergy as a class as well as individuals is proclaimed in *Mansfield Park*. In the other novels the clergyman takes his place with other members of local society—high if he is well born like Henry Tilney, not so high if, like Mr. Elton, he has “no alliances but in trade”. All of them, from Mr. Collins onward, are judged as men among other men and are ridiculous or delightful as the individual case may be. But *Mansfield Park* introduces another standard, and we know from her letters that one of her acknowledged purposes in writing it was to magnify the clerical office—from the religious point of view, be it said, rather than the social, though she certainly pays the latter some attention.

I cannot think she has been altogether successful in her design. Edmund Bertram is not only a prig but a prig without the courage of his convictions, and as all the clergy in the novel are prosperous, well-connected people, we have no opportunity of seeing the office stand up away from its social supports, as we have in the case of Parson Adams. Mostly she seeks to commend it by way of dialogue, in which I fear that the unregenerate reader often finds the anti-clerical Mary Crawford scoring more heavily than the pompous Edmund and his yes-woman Fanny.

*Mansfield Park* is the only novel that sometimes puts me out of humour with Jane Austen. It is the only one with which I find myself temperamentally at issue. Normally her outlook is very much my own, and I am in sympathy with what appear to be her personal tastes and opinions. Even the snobbery I recognise in myself in an inverted form. But in *Mansfield Park* she often seems quite unlike herself, as seen in the other novels. We sometimes meet a puritanical, censorious Jane, who though she still has her sense of humour has lost her sense of fun, and is without either the gaiety of *Emma* or the charity of *Persuasion*.

I do not join issue with her on quite the same ground as G. B. Stern in “The Mansfield Park Quartette”, for I like Mary Crawford a good deal less and Fanny Price a good deal more than my collaborator, though we are pretty well agreed as to the respective merits of Henry and Edmund. My complaint is more general and directed against the author’s judgment of certain harmless things and certain pleasant people.

"Mrs. Rushworth had gone for the Easter holidays to Twickenham, with a family whom she had just grown intimate with—a family of lively, agreeable manners *and probably of morals and discretion to suit.*" The italics are mine, for they emphasise the idea that the moral slackness elaborated in the rest of the paragraph is only to be expected from lively, agreeable people. This is a surprising assumption for the creator of Elizabeth Bennet, Emma Woodhouse and Henry Tilney. Indeed one might say that the other five novels abound with lively, agreeable people whose morals and discretion are above suspicion. One could go even further and say that immorality in the other novels is invariably associated with stupidity—"the violence of her passions—the weakness of her understanding" might have been a commentary on Lydia Bennet as well as on Eliza Williams. It is only in *Mansfield Park* that Jane Austen seems to find something ominous in a lively, playful manner and something admirable in heavy seriousness.

I am not basing my accusation on a single phrase. Throughout the book there is a mistrust of gaiety, and a straining at gnats—i.e. Mary Crawford's comments on the Admiral, her uncle, which most people, knowing what she and her aunt had had to endure from him, would have regarded (except for the shocking pun on Rears and Vices) as entirely pardonable. Yet I do not for a moment think that Jane is representing Edmund and Fanny as prigs when they criticise her remarks as "very wrong—very indecorous"—"very ungrateful". Those were the days of strong family loyalties—as witness Elizabeth Bennet's indignation at Darcy's criticism of her family, even though he had said nothing which she had not thought herself, and Eleanor Tilney's attitude towards her father's preposterous treatment of her friend—but all Mary had done was to say of an uncle who, the author tells us, was a man of vicious conduct, who chose, instead of retaining his niece, to bring his mistress under his roof, that he was "not the first favourite in the world". Yet "she ought not to have spoken of her uncle as she did. I was quite astonished . . . I could not have believed it!"

When dealing with the real faults of Mary's character—her insincerity, her worldliness, her self-interest, her petty dogmatism "she would only smile and assert"—her amazing stupidity—for only a stupid woman would so have exposed herself to Fanny on the subject of Tom's illness—Jane is her old self, without comment or bias. Indeed I regard the presentation of Mary Crawford as one of her triumphs. The young woman is seen completely in the round, her strength and her weakness, her charms and her shams, her single-hearted love of her brother—about her only unselfish emotion—and all the conflicting tides of her far from single-hearted, exceedingly complicated, exceedingly selfish love of

Edmund Bertram. Apart from the unnecessary moralisings which her liveliness never fails to produce, one feels for her much as one would feel in real life—attracted yet distrustful, sometimes exasperated, as when she lays down the law on matters she obviously does not understand, sometimes warmly approving, as when she champions Fanny against Aunt Norris.

But unfortunately it is difficult to detach any of the characters from the moralisings in which they are embedded—sometimes by the conversation of Edmund and Fanny, sometimes by the direct voice of their creator. The distribution of rewards and punishments at the end of the book is more like the Day of Judgment than anything else in Jane Austen.

There is also her attitude towards the private theatricals at Mansfield Park—an attitude which is quite surprising when one realises that for years theatricals of some kind had been an annual institution at Steventon Parsonage. The large family and their friends performed *The Rivals* in 1784, when Jane was only nine, *The Wonder* in 1787, *The Sultan* in 1790, as well as *High Life Below Stairs*. “Eliza de Feuillide gives us some idea of the serious nature of the theatricals when she tells Philadelphia Water that she can only come to Steventon if she will act, ‘for my Aunt Austen declares she has not room for any idle young people. . . . Do not let your dress disturb you as I think I can manage it so that the *Green Room* should provide you with what is necessary for acting. I assure you that we shall have a most brilliant party and a great deal of amusement.’” \*

Something must surely have happened to account for the difference between all this and Jane Austen’s disapproval of a similar family entertainment in 1811. It cannot be merely the unsuitable nature of the play chosen, for the opposition is just as great before *Lovers’ Vows* is decided upon as afterwards. Nor can we really see any convincing objection in Maria’s “situation”, since her fiancé was also to be a member of the cast. From the dialogue one gathers that the objections of Edmund and Fanny—in which the author evidently expresses her own—are much more fundamental—“You are not serious, Tom, in meaning to act? . . . I think it would very wrong . . . I am convinced that my father would totally disapprove of it (which he certainly did) . . . he would never wish his grown-up daughters to be acting plays. His sense of decorum is too strict.” Even Jane herself seems occasionally weary of Edmund, but obviously not on the subject of the play. For Fanny is just as firm and far more consistent as an objector, and the account of Sir Thomas’s return and destruction of the whole plan is obviously written from the standpoint of sympathetic approval.

\* *Jane Austen and Steventon*, by Emma Austen-Leigh.



No, a shadow has fallen over *Mansfield Park* which does not lie over the three earlier novels and has passed away before the next appears. I wonder if I am guessing very wildly when I suggest that that shadow is the Evangelical Revival. I have no external evidence ; though it might be at least a change from the usual supposition that the letters which Cassandra Austen destroyed were connected with some secret love-affair to imagine that they revealed instead a religious experience (if they were not merely too libellously candid—in the modern sense—for preservation). We know that the novel was written after a silent interval of some years, which the author had spent mainly in Bath, where she would have had plenty of opportunity for hearing some of the great Evangelical preachers

That she was a religious woman is shown by her letters and the testimony of her family, and it seems reasonable to suppose that in a centre like Bath she would have come in contact with the chief religious movement of her age. Even though Wesley's disciples had by this time left the Established Church, the Methodist societies had not yet lost all connection with it ; and though I am sure that Jane herself was never an "enthusiast", I can well believe that any contacts she may have had with the Revival would have deepened her moral sense and increased the seriousness which underlies even her wittiest moments.

That it went further and made her censorious would not have been out of keeping with the Movement's history and its effect on other people. We have only to read the life and some of the poetry of Cowper to realise how deadly could be the impact of its more sinister theology on a kind and sensitive nature. If indeed Jane was affected by it she was lucky to escape with only a mild attack of what destroyed the poet she admired so greatly. She would have owed her preservation partly to her own good sense, partly to a mind not already reduced by an unhappy childhood, partly no doubt to her own firmer grounding in the old-fashioned High Church theology of her father's day, which would have put up a strong resistance to the deeper infections of Calvinism. She certainly was not fundamentally or permanently influenced, but I feel that some outside cause must be invoked to account for the difference in outlook between *Mansfield Park* and its less serious, less censorious predecessors. It is only a conjecture, and as Frank Churchill says, "sometimes one conjectures right and sometimes one conjectures wrong", but I believe I have some indirect evidence for it.

There are in the novel actually two direct references to the Revival, though they are slight enough. It is curious that they should both come from Mary Crawford. In her first letter to Fanny at Portsmouth she writes—"Your cousin Edmund moves slowly, detained perchance

by parish duties. There may be some old woman at Thornton Lacey to be converted." And again in her farewell interview with Edmund she says, "when I hear of you next it may be as a celebrated preacher in some great society of Methodists". Now her use of the word "converted" is entirely Evangelical and unknown until the Movement made it a piece of its religious jargon; and her reference to the Methodists is the only occasion in the novels that they are mentioned at all. Is it unreasonably rash to suppose that both had recently impressed themselves upon the author's consciousness?

Anyhow, whether I am right or wrong, the whole thing has cleared away by the next novel. There is nothing puritanical or censorious about *Emma*, nor anything deliberately elevating. Her clergyman, too, has sunk socially as well as religiously—he is only common clay and bears his full share of the author's contempt. Even when in *Persuasion* we come on a level of greater seriousness, and meet in Anne Elliot a character who is obviously of the same order of creation as Fanny Price, the cloud, the dark shadow, does not yet return.

It is true that G. B. Stern gets a glimpse of it in Anne's suspicion that with Mr. Elliot "there had been bad habits; that Sunday travelling had been a common thing"—and certainly no objection to Sunday travelling is shown in the earlier *Pride and Prejudice*, where Jane and Elizabeth Bennet insist on driving home from Netherfield on a Sunday, though their mother "had calculated on her daughters remaining till the following Tuesday, which would exactly finish Jane's week", or in *Northanger Abbey* where the fact that Catherine was forced by the General to travel seventy miles on a Sunday has evidently no place on the score against him. But we must remember that the British Sunday goes back all the way to the Merry Monarch, who gave the Royal Assent to the Lord's Day Observance Act. Its prohibitions were no doubt a part of Jane's upbringing, and therefore the change of attitude towards it in the novels is not quite on the same level as the change of attitude towards private theatricals—her disapproval of which must be accounted for by some influence which has intruded since her youth.

Altogether I see *Mansfield Park* standing out of line with the other novels. There is a *something* which makes it different, a something which is not the same as that which makes a difference in *Persuasion*. I have made my conjecture as to what that something is, and sometimes, I know, one conjectures wrong . . .

*Mansfield Park*, though the only novel to deal with the clergy professionally and to consider their office apart from their personalities, is far from being the only one in which they play an important part. Indeed their number throughout the novels might almost be thought

excessive. For though it is natural that as a daughter of the parsonage Jane should prefer to write about the kind of man most familiar to her, it seems disproportionate that three heroines out of only six novels should end by marrying parsons, and that two more should receive offers of marriage from clerical admirers. Marianne Dashwood and Anne Elliot are the only two heroines who have never been proposed to by a clergyman.

But a refreshing characteristic of the Jane Austen clergy which prevents our ever being overwhelmed by them is that, even in *Mansfield Park*, they are all human. They certainly do not belong to a separate clerical sub-species, as is too often the case in modern fiction, where moreover they are liable to be overcome by sinister passions which in any other psychological dress would recall *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. Nor do their portraits display the personal malice that sharpens the pen of that other daughter of the parsonage, Charlotte Brontë. There is nothing sinister or malicious about any one of them; they are very much alive, and very unlike one another, and all except Edmund and Mr. Collins agreeably unpriggish and unpompous.

My favourite in this gallery of clerical portraits is Henry Tilney, but I have sometimes wondered why his author made him a clergyman at all, so invisible and unimportant is anything clerical in this light-hearted hero of *The Rooms*. Some other situation than his departure on duty at Woodston might have been contrived to get him away from Northanger at the critical moment. One feels that Jane Austen made him a clergyman for the same reason that she made his brother a soldier—just to give him some sort of a profession out of the few at her disposal. Also it is probable that like Isabella Thorpe she is “partial to the cloth”. But having frocked him (metaphorically only, for we hear from Mary Crawford, that unlikely dispenser of clerical information, that “luckily there is no distinction of dress nowadays to tell tales”) she leaves him for the rest of the book as unclerical as his brother was unmilitary. He visits Woodston and Frederick rejoins his regiment; but except for the difficulty of so long an absence their positions might have been reversed.

I wonder what Edmund Bertram would have thought of Henry Tilney . . . not that he would necessarily have disapproved of his dancing so much; for it was Mary, not Edmund, who disapproved of the dancing parson. “She never has danced with a clergyman, she says, and she never *will*.” We know too that Mr. Collins “was very far from dreading a rebuke, either from the Archbishop or Lady Catherine de Bourgh, by venturing to dance”. While Mr. Elton, though churlishly refusing to dance with Harriet Smith at the Westons’

ball did not find an excuse in his cloth but in the fact that he was "an old married man" whose dancing days were over. But even though they both danced, I do not think Edmund would have had much in common with Henry Tilney. They certainly would not have been, in Mary's language, "clergymen together".

I am led on by this to another interesting question—would Mary have married him? Supposing that Northanger Abbey and the Tilneys could have changed places with Mansfield Park and the Bertrams, would she have shown the same reluctance to marry a clergyman? I think she would have still shown reluctance—for her dislike of the profession was genuine and she would have done her best to detach him from it—but it would not have been to the same extent. Because for one thing she would not have had to endure from him those moralisings and recoils which were enough to daunt a young woman more deeply in love than she was. On the other hand, he too was a younger son. . . . Yet, on the whole, I can see Mary as Mrs. Henry Tilney in a way I cannot even imagine her as Mrs. Edmund Bertram.

There is another characteristic of the Jane Austen clergy besides their variety and humanity which is just as remote from the clerical rules of modern fiction; and that is their almost complete childlessness. She herself came of a large family, a typical parsonage quiverful, yet there is only one such family in all the numerous parsonages in the six novels. It is true that Mr. Collins is expecting an "olive branch" at the end of *Pride and Prejudice*, but he and Mr. Morland of *Northanger Abbey* are the only exceptions I can recall in an unprecedented run of clerical sterility.

Of course one reason for this may be that so many of Jane's parsons marry her heroines, and these we know are invariably childless. In all the accounts and forecasts of married bliss that wind up the novels there is no place for Squire Western's nuptial blessing of "a fine boy this day nine months". Jane we feel was doing her creator's best for Elizabeth, Jane, Fanny, Emma, Catherine, Marianne, Elinor and Anne by sparing them these odious little encumbrances. But even the clergy who do not marry heroines escape them. Mr. Elton, though "an old married man" of some months, had no expectation of an olive branch, and both Mr. Norris and Dr. Grant are childless, though they have been married for years.

One final characteristic, and I have done with Jane Austen's clergy. All of them have this point in common, without a single exception. (All of them are entirely devoid of the smallest grain of spiritual function.) Serious, moralising Edmund Bertram is as much without it as gay, dancing Henry Tilney. They are all moral, honest, and well behaved;

we know that Mr. Collins was "ever ready to perform those rites and ceremonies which are instituted by the Church of England", and we have Harriet Smith's testimony that "Mr. Elton is so good to the poor". The Austen parsons are no Trullibers. But when we come to that other-world quality, that contact with things which are above parochial duties, above either "gentleness" or gentility, above even honesty and morality, we are forced to admit the superiority of Fielding's "good" clergy, as distinct from the Trullibers, deplorably though they may fall short of the standards of Rosings and Mansfield Park.

Fielding, remote from the parsonage atmosphere, differing in many ways from Jane on matters of conduct and morality, saw the parish clergyman, even if he were no more than a poor sweated curate, as the friend and father of his people, one of themselves, differing from them only in spiritual power. As we watch Parson Adams's dealings with his flock, his fatherly love and care of Joseph and Fanny, carried even to the point of sharing their physical humiliations and mishaps—yes, even when we see him standing in his torn cassock, with bloody, broken head, brandishing his chamber-pot as a weapon of defence, even then we feel that Parson Adams has more of the priestly function in his little finger than Edmund Bertram has in his whole body—and soul.

Jane Austen was, I am sure, a religious woman, but the only religion that appears in her novels is the "morality tinged with emotion" of Matthew Arnold's depressing definition. Even in *Mansfield Park*, the novel most clearly reflecting the religious thought of her day, we get nothing better. Perhaps she had nothing better herself; but I do not think so. She was never a writer to put, except perhaps for a moment in *Persuasion*, her most personal thoughts and emotions into her books, and I think (she would have held the vital content of religion to be outside her scope as a novelist.) She certainly was not always happy in suggesting its externals.

I have sometimes wondered which of her parsons I should turn to if I definitely had to consult one of them in a fix; and I have decided without much hesitation that it would be Henry Tilney.

## CHAPTER X

### “ Addicted to Letter-Writing ”

G. B. STERN

“EVERYBODY at all addicted to letter-writing,” Miss Austen remarks in *Mansfield Park*, “without having much to say, which will include a large proportion of the female world, at least, must feel with Lady Bertram that she was out of luck in having such a capital piece of Mansfield news as the certainty of the Grants going to Bath, occur at a time when she could make no advantage of it, and will admit that it must have been very mortifying to her to see it fall to the share of her thankless son, and treated as concisely as possible at the end of a long letter, instead of having it to spread over the largest part of a page of her own.”

And indeed, in all the Jane Austen novels, not only the letters themselves, but her characters' frequent and lively discussion of them, their style and importance, their length and frequency, prove once more how the telephone not only hath murdered sleep (too often), but is also responsible for slaying a talent which combined narrative grace with dramatic and informative value.) In *Pride and Prejudice*, a letter from Mr. Collins, thanking the Bennets for their hospitality, has given its name “a Collins”, for all time to all bread-and-butter letters of gratitude, sincere or sycophantic. (In two of the novels, *Sense and Sensibility* and *Persuasion*, a letter marks the climax of the whole story, the breaking of tension into great grief or great joy. By an inspiration subtle yet brilliant, and I am almost certain, unique in fiction, Wentworth's proposal in letter form, which was to give Anne so much undreamt-of felicity, was written in her actual presence. This chapter in her last novel, her finest for its depth of true feeling and the loveliness of the heroine's character, was, as is well known, Jane Austen's second attempt at writing the *dénouement* of *Persuasion*; the original chapter, which contained no letter, did not please her, it was too tame. The second attempt proved brilliantly successful.)

In the same fashion, though with less success, Mr. Martin puts his fortunes to the test with Harriet :

“Will you read the letter?” cried Harriet. “Pray do. I'd rather you would.”

Emma was not sorry to be pressed. She read, and was surprised. The style of the letter was much above her expectation. There were not merely no grammatical errors, but as a composition it would not have disgraced a gentleman; the language, though plain, was strong and unaffected, and the sentiments it conveyed very much to the credit of the writer . . . Harriet stood anxiously watching for her opinion, with a "Well, well", and was at last forced to add, "Is it a good letter, or is it too short?"

"Yes, indeed, a very good letter," replied Emma, rather slowly—"so good a letter, Harriet, that, everything considered, I think one of his sisters must have helped him. . . . And yet it is not the style of a woman; no, certainly, it is too strong and concise—not diffuse enough for a woman. No doubt he is a sensible man, and, I suppose, may have a natural talent for—thinks strongly and clearly—and when he takes a pen in hand, his thoughts naturally find proper words. It is so with some men."

(For apparently at the period of Jane Austen there existed a strongly marked division, recognised and accepted, between the letters written by gentlemen and the letters written by ladies.) Henry Tilney had something to say about this; so had Darcy and Mary Crawford. Tilney's criticism is the most scathing towards all feminine correspondence, though we can be sure that he delivers his remarks with an air of such good humour and charm that Catherine, deeply impressed by his wisdom and pungency, is nevertheless not in the least wounded:

"I have sometimes thought," said Catherine, doubtfully, "whether ladies *do* write so much better letters than gentlemen. That is, I should not think the superiority was always on our side."

"As far as I have had opportunity of judging, it appears to me that the usual style of letter-writing among women is faultless, except in three particulars."

"And what are they?"

"A general deficiency of subject, a total inattention of stops, and a very frequent ignorance of grammar."

Mary Crawford concentrates upon the casual indifference of brothers as an unsatisfactory race of correspondents:

"... What strange creatures brothers are! . . . when obliged to take up a pen to say that such a horse is ill, or such a relation dead, it is done in the fewest possible words. You have but one style among you. I know it perfectly. Henry, who is in every other respect exactly what a brother should be, who loves me, consults me, confides in me, and will talk to me by the hour together, has never

yet turned the page in a letter ; and very often it is nothing more than —‘ Dear Mary, I am just arrived. Bath seems full, and everything as usual. Yours sincerely.’ That is the true manly style ; that is a complete brother’s letter.”

Probably these comments are as true now as they were in 1814.

A delightful scene between Darcy and Miss Bingley is not only a discussion on letter-writing, but a picture of a nonchalant gentleman doing his best to snub an importunate lady who will not leave him alone :

“ How delighted Miss Darcy will be to receive such a letter ! ”

He made no answer.

“ You write uncommonly fast.”

“ You are mistaken ; I write rather slowly.”

“ How many letters you must have occasion to write in the course of a year—letters of business, too ! How odious I should think them ! ”

“ It is fortunate, then, that they fall to my lot instead of to yours.”

“ Pray tell your sister that I long to see her.”

“ I have already told her so once, by your desire.”

“ I am afraid you do not like your pen. Let me mend it for you. I mend pens remarkably well.”

“ Thank you—but I always mend my own.”

“ How can you contrive to write so even ? ”

He was silent . . .

“ But do you always write such charming long letters to her, Mr. Darcy ? ”

“ They are generally long ; but whether always charming, it is not for me to determine.”

“ It is a rule with me that a person who can write a long letter with ease cannot write ill.”

“ That will not do for a compliment to Darcy, Caroline,” cried her brother, “ because he does *not* write with ease. He studies too much for words of four syllables.—Do you not, Darcy ? ”

“ My style of writing is very different from yours.”

“ Oh,” cried Miss Bingley, “ Charles writes in the most careless way imaginable. He leaves out half his words, and blots the rest.”

“ My ideas flow so rapidly that I have not time to express them ; by which means my letters sometimes convey no ideas at all to my correspondents.”

Darcy’s letters certainly would have given Mary Crawford no reason for complaint on the score of length ; the letter which he handed Elizabeth in the Park at Rosings the day after he proposed to her, ran



on, in my edition, for over seven pages of print, and one wonders how it could even have been squeezed into "an envelope containing two sheets of letter paper, written quite through, in a very close hand. The envelope itself was likewise full." Nowadays when we say "So-and-so has written me a stiff letter", the adjective has acquired a somewhat different meaning; Darcy's was a very stiff letter indeed, and at the end, "I will only add, God bless you," that touch of real spontaneous feeling is something of a shock compared with the deliberation, weightiness and self-justification of the rest. We cannot be surprised that Elizabeth found it hard to repress "such reflections as must make her unfit for conversation . . . she could think only of her letter".

And Frank Churchill's letter explaining his false conduct during his stay in Highbury was shorter only by half a page. We sympathise with Mr. Knightley when he exclaimed: "Say nothing, dear Emma, while you oblige me to read. . . . What a letter the man writes."

Emma says: "I wish you would read it with a kinder spirit towards him." But she was expecting too much from a man as deeply in love with her, who had only been accepted the day before, and who would prefer to have been talking about their own future. "And a fine ending; and there is a letter. . . . And now, let me talk to you of something else."

Apparently in Jane Austen's time one could not hope to escape her light mockery, either by dashing off a hasty note in the style burlesqued by Mary Crawford, nor putting too much thought to it, like Frank Churchill and Mr. Collins (how Churchill would have hated being thus bracketed!). Nor by a style formally insincere, like Lady Bertram's:

For though Lady Bertram rather shone in the epistolary line, having early in her marriage, from the want of other employment, and the circumstance of Sir Thomas's being in Parliament, got into the way of making and keeping correspondents, and formed for herself a very creditable, commonplace, amplifying style, so that a very little matter was enough for her: . . .

The sufferings which Lady Bertram did not see had little power over her fancy; and she wrote very comfortably about agitation, and anxiety, and poor invalids, till Tom was actually conveyed to Mansfield, and her own eyes had beheld his altered appearance. Then a letter which she had been previously preparing for Fanny was finished in a different style, in the language of real feeling and alarm; then she wrote as she might have spoken. "He is just come, my dear Fanny, and is taken upstairs; and I am so shocked to see him that I do not know what to do. I am sure he has been very ill. Poor Tom! I am quite grieved for him, and very much frightened, and

so is Sir Thomas ; and how glad I should be if you were here to comfort me."

We never respect Lady Bertram as much as in that moment. I nearly wrote "we never like her as much"—but indeed "like" is inadequate to express my perpetual delight in this character in whatever she says, does, feels and mostly omits to feel ; her lacunæ are in themselves so rich with comedy that only Mr. Woodhouse takes precedence of her in my list of favourites.

Mary Crawford writes the sort of letter we all enjoy seeing on the breakfast table, not particularly elegant nor emotional, but meaty with gossip, and a touch of malice, not too much ; Fanny, of course, disapproves of them from start to finish. Their chief charm lies in Miss Crawford's intense absorption in the stream of personal daily events, and the vitality which informs them with her own shrewd raciness of disposition ; she says herself elsewhere : "I am something like the famous Doge at the court of Lewis XIV ; and may declare that I see no wonder in this shrubbery equal to seeing myself in it." She was not uneducated, this Mary Crawford ; the art of allusion was hers. An interesting feature of Mary's letter to Fanny, when the latter was living at Portsmouth, was the postscript in which she repeats several important messages from her brother, Henry ; it would seem that decorum forbade young gentlemen of that period to write to young ladies unless they had openly plighted their troth. Elinor says in *Sense and Sensibility*, when Lucy shows her a letter in Edward's writing, "she could doubt no longer. The picture, she had allowed herself to believe, might have been accidentally obtained ; it might not have been Edward's gift ; but a correspondence between them by letter could subsist only under a positive engagement, could be authorised by nothing else." And the same point is emphasized a little further on in the book, when Elinor sees Marianne sit down to write a letter directly they arrived at Mrs. Jennings's house in London : "It immediately struck her that she must then be writing to Willoughby, and the conclusion which as instantly followed was, that however mysteriously they might wish to conduct the affair, they must be engaged." Crawford obviously, for all the boldness of his wooing, would not smash convention so far as himself to write one single line to Fanny, though he travelled all the way to Portsmouth from London simply to visit her, hear her soft voice, press her hand, walk with her upon the ramparts. It showed the moral force of the prohibition, that he left his ardour to be conveyed in a postscript to his sister's missive. Catherine and Tilney were tacitly allowed a "clandestine correspondence" (until the General gave his consent to an

open engagement) as an instance of most unusual toleration and broad-mindedness on the part of her parents :

Mr. and Mrs. Morland . . . had been too kind to exact any promise, and whenever Catherine received a letter, as at that time happened pretty often, they always looked another way.

Naturally Jane Austen uses letters to reveal character ; indeed, *Lady Susan* was written entirely in letters, and so was *Elinor and Marianne*, the first version of *Sense and Sensibility*. Of all those which are a perfect give-away, I would choose the letter which Isabella Thorpe writes to her dearest Catherine from Bath to Northanger. Over and over again, the whole of Isabella is packed into a sentence. The author relishes her own wickedness as she could not do were Isabella more worthy :

“ . . . Captain Tilney, who, as you may remember, was amazingly disposed to follow and tease me, before you went away. Afterwards he got worse, and became quite my shadow. Many girls might have been taken in, for never were such attentions ; but I knew the fickle sex too well. He went away to his regiment two days ago, and I trust I shall never be plagued with him again. He is the greatest coxcomb I ever saw, and amazingly disagreeable. The last two days he was always by the side of Charlotte Davis : I pitied his taste, but took no notice of him . . . ”

This is the ironic spirit at its sweetest [sic] and best. The same strain is revealed in two letters from Miss Lucy Steele in *Sense and Sensibility* : but Lucy, like her name, is of steelier material than Isabella Thorpe, though by no means stainless ; she is not so much the delicious ass ; they are both vain, greedy and ambitious, but I do not think Lucy is as aware of the other sex in every turn of her body and flicker of her eyelids as Isabella. It is interesting to note the difference that must exist between Miss Austen and an author of to-day in reproducing an uneducated style :

He put the letter into Elinor's hands—

“ Dear Sir,—Being very sure I have long lost your affections, I have thought myself at liberty to bestow my own on another, and have no doubt of being as happy with him as I once used to think I might be with you ; but I scorn to accept a hand while the heart was another's. Sincerely wish you are happy in your choice, and it shall not be my fault if we are not always good friends, as our near relationship now makes proper. . . . Thought I would first trouble you with these few lines, and shall always remain,—Your sincere well-wisher, friend, and sister, Lucy Ferrars.”

Elinor read and returned it without any comment.

"I will not ask your opinion of it as a composition," said Edward "For worlds would not I have had a letter of hers seen by *you* in former days. . . . This is the only letter I ever received from her, of which the substance made me any amends for the defect of the style."

Jane Austen's own letters show from page to page her excessive delight in the small, odd, senseless behaviour of all those who come and go within her range of vision.) Perhaps this is what makes them at times somewhat wearisome reading; they arrive, they stay five minutes, and they depart again, yet within that five minutes Miss Austen has run a sharp little instrument, like a pastry-cutter, around their chief absurdity, so that she may serve it up for the delectation of her sister Cassandra next time she writes. It perplexes me, nevertheless, that I should never tire of this sort of thing in her novels, and yet can do with so little of it when reading the collection of Jane Austen letters. The answer may be merely that in each book we grow to know a small community, a group of characters, and every item of news concerning what they do or what they say, or even how they look, helps to build them up for us; we have a lust to know them better and better; we cannot know them too well. That the rivet came out from old Mrs. Bates's spectacles just at the moment that the baked apples came home (sent out by Mrs. Wallace's boy) fascinates us: here is no procession of trivialities; here is the Bateses' very home in Highbury, their daily life and their characteristic reactions; Mrs. and Miss Bates are two of our very good friends. But in Miss Austen's letters we are spattered with a constant stream of fresh names as the years go on and the Austen family move about; a dozen names, often, on one page; therefore it is impossible to be interested; the picture lacks a static frame; we cannot recall who these people are, and directly we take trouble to find out, we lose sight of them again, so it is hardly worth while, and our jaded eyes return with relief and thankfulness to the dozen or so of our familiar friends in *Emma* or *Persuasion*.

Rarely, very rarely indeed, does real feeling break through the light froth, the comic detail of her own letters; when it does, when she has to mingle bad news with consolation, it is curious to note how naturalness forsakes her, that playful wit and irony which quickens every line she writes to her sister Cassandra during her happy days—and most of them were happy—for which, though she never knew it, we must thank her resilient nature, her effortless flow of grateful appreciation for the blessings on a small scale with which life seemed to have endowed her. Many women, more temperamental, less exquisitely balanced in mind and affectionate in heart, would have made not only their own daily

lives miserable by temperament, restlessness and discontent with their lot, but also the family atmosphere immediately surrounding them ; for Jane Austen, though she had to endure no actual privations, did not have a particularly exciting life, did not travel abroad, did not have a husband, children and home of her own, nor attract a multitude of ardent lovers. She was deeply sorrowful when her father died, and it is her letters announcing this loss to her brother Frank, a sailor on board H.M.S. *Leopard*, that I was remembering when I spoke of that strange stilted beginning, so different from her usual free style : " I have melancholy news to relate, and sincerely feel for your feelings under the shock of it . . . your mind will already forestall the sort of event which I have to communicate—" From a sister to a dear brother, even allowing for the epistolary style of the period, does that not seem a little stiff, a little too well phrased, compared with the constant natural gaiety of her many letters in quite a different strain to Cassandra, and later to her dearest nieces, Fanny and Anna ? This letter to Frank reminds me of Lady Bertram's letter to Fanny Price treating of Tom's illness, quoted earlier in this chapter, when she " rather shone in the epistolary line " until she beheld Tom with her own eyes : " then she wrote in the language of real feeling and alarm . . . as she might have spoken." Jane Austen herself does exactly the same ; her two letters to Frank vary between the style of heavy communication, " Adieu my dearest Frank. The loss of such a Parent must be felt, or we should be Brutes . . . twenty minutes after ten he drew his last gasp," and " he went off almost in his sleep ". Not one of her letters is as moving, however, as, towards the end of her last illness, a simple description of her family's affection, the tenderness and the alleviation which it must bring to one so tender of heart herself. Otherwise the greater proportion bear out the eternal truth of her confession to Cassandra, written on Wednesday, June 15th of 1808 : " you know how interesting the purchase of a sponge-cake is to me." Yes, but of her power to make the purchase of a sponge-cake interesting to immortality, she will never know.

## CHAPTER XI

### “ You Must Not Expect a Prodigy ”

(a) G. B. STERN

(1) COLONEL BRANDON

“ AFTER a silence of some minutes he said with a faint smile . . . ”  
This was Colonel Brandon, and you will probably be perplexed as to why I have chosen such a commonplace line for quotation. Yet really the line is not commonplace at all, and should be spoken to the accompaniment of a roll of drums and a clash of cymbals : “ he said *with a faint smile* ” . . .

For it is the only time in *Sense and Sensibility* that Colonel Brandon does smile. Never once do we hear him laugh. And you will perceive it is only a faint smile, but even then it breaks the settled gloom.

When an author fails with one of her characters, it must, I think, be defined as a lack of perception, a certain bluntness of outlook where this particular character is concerned. For where the author is aware she has failed, she will be compelled to do something about it : alter it, cut it, add to it, so that it will remain an uneven lop-sided conception with some irrelevant good scenes and some hopeless ; showing traces of exasperated tinkering. Where a character is a plain failure, evenly spread, we can usually detect some slight complacency in its creator.

I do not for one moment believe that Jane Austen was aware how she had failed with Colonel Brandon. She would have consented, certainly, that this was no flashy personality, but a serious, upright man with strong principles and fine generous qualities ; not a young spark any more, though not nearly as old as that little goose of seventeen, Marianne Dashwood, at first would make him out to be. All the better, then ; here he is with his sober, steady sense, his faithful heart, standing in fair hues beside Willoughby's contrasting black, patiently awaiting his reward, at the end of the book : “ Colonel Brandon was now as happy as all those who best loved him believed he deserved to be ;— in Marianne he was consoled for every past affliction ; her regard and her society restored his mind to animation, and his spirits to cheerfulness.”

Goodness triumphant and everyone happy. Nobody within the pages of *Sense and Sensibility* will be on my side when I state sorrowfully

that I would rather have seen Marianne wedded to Willoughby (a rejoicing widower) than mistress of Delaford and wife of Colonel Wet-Blanket.

Yet it has been proved in some of Miss Austen's other books, that she can accomplish just this sort of quiet pairing-off without forfeiting ✓ the reader's perfect agreement that she knows best. Emma Woodhouse was hardly older than Marianne, and equally headstrong and self-willed, yet we feel nothing but pleasure when she ends up with Knightley for her husband, not Frank Churchill as had seemed at one moment probable. Frank Churchill is the equivalent of Willoughby ; Knightley of Colonel Brandon. Many years older than the girl he desires, of upright principles, strength of character, sober good sense, both Knightley and Colonel Brandon are suitors respectively approved by Emma's father (in the slow fullness of time) and Marianne's mother (impulsively and wholeheartedly). Both men can offer the heroine an establishment and a comfortable estate ; neither can be called, in the same sense as Willoughby and Churchill, a romantic figure ; yet Knightley is definitely attractive, where Colonel Brandon is a dreary bore. The difference is mysterious, and I am not sure that even by searching we shall be able to lay a finger on the cause.

Yet here is something to begin with : Jane Austen has throughout chosen the wrong set of adjectives for Colonel Brandon :

She liked him—in spite of his gravity and reserve, she beheld in him an object of interest.

His manners, though serious, were mild ; and his reserve appeared rather the result of some oppression of spirits, than of any natural gloominess of temper.

Sir John had dropped hints of past injuries and disappointments, which justified her belief of his being an unfortunate man.

And a little further on, we find Elinor, Marianne and Willoughby in discussion on the subject ; Willoughby, indeed, hits him off marvellously :

“ Brandon is just the kind of man . . . whom everyone speaks well of, and nobody cares about ; whom all are delighted to see, and nobody remembers to talk to . . . I do not dislike him. I consider him, on the contrary, as a very respectable man, who has everybody's good word and nobody's notice ; who has more money than he can spend, more time than he knows how to employ, and two new coats every year.”

“ Add to which,” cried Marianne, “ that he has neither genius, taste, nor spirit. That his understanding has no brilliancy, his feelings no ardour, and his voice no expression.”

"You decide on his imperfections so much in the mass," replied Elinor, "and so much on the strength of your own imagination, that the commendation *I* am able to give of him is comparatively cold and insipid. I can only pronounce him to be a sensible man, well-bred, well-informed, of gentle address, and, I believe, possessing an amiable heart. . . . But I must object to your dooming Colonel Brandon and his wife to the constant confinement of a sick chamber, merely because he chanced to complain yesterday (a very cold, damp day) of a slight rheumatic feel in one of his shoulders."

"But he talked of flannel waistcoats," said Marianne.

Marianne is right and Elinor is wrong. *Why* does Colonel Brandon talk of flannel waistcoats? *Why* does he complain of a slight rheumatic feel in one of his shoulders? It was perfectly easy to be silent on both subjects. Has he no idea how to recommend himself to a romantic girl of seventeen?

When I go quickly through *Sense and Sensibility*, I catch sight of phrases relating to Colonel Brandon such as :

"Something very melancholy must be the matter, I am sure," said she. "I could see it in his face. Poor man !"

"He is such a charming man, that it is quite a pity he should be so grave and so dull."

It grieved her to see the earnestness with which he often watched Marianne, and his spirits were certainly worse than when at Barton.

He replied with all his accustomed mildness to all her inquiries, but without satisfying her in any.

He looked more than usually grave.

She was left . . . with a melancholy impression of Colonel Brandon's unhappiness.

"The Colonel looks as grave as ever, you see."

Mrs. Jennings . . . saw him with amazement, remain the whole evening more serious and thoughtful than usual.

Mrs. Jennings . . . knew only that the Colonel continued as grave as ever.

The many hours of each day in which he was left entirely alone were but too favourable for the admission of every melancholy idea, and he could not expel from his mind the persuasion that he should see Marianne no more.

Her fears, he had no courage, no confidence to attempt the removal of ;—he listened to them in silent despondence.

She soon discovered in his melancholy eye and varying complexion



as he looked at her sister, the probable recurrence of many past scenes of misery to his mind.

And finally :

A three weeks' residence at Delaford, where, in his evening hours at least, he had little to do but to calculate the disproportion between thirty-six and seventeen, brought him to Barton in a temper of mind which needed all the improvement in Marianne's looks, all the kindness of her welcome, and all the encouragement of her mother's language, to make it cheerful.

I may be accused of unfairness in collecting these samples, and setting them forth without their context ; but indeed, I have been perfectly conscientious, and had I found evidence in *Sense and Sensibility* that Colonel Brandon did occasionally rouse himself from melancholy, despondency, silence and gloom, I would willingly have chosen my quotations to serve as his advocates. But the gloom never lifts ; sometimes the dank air which hangs about him is slightly lighter ; at other times it clings like a dark grey mist ; but he is never our sunshine boy ; he is never even, like Knightley or Darcy, both serious men, amusing in a sardonic way. Knightley's dry wit is as good as any more sparkling conversation, and I like to hear Darcy polishing off Miss Bingley when her persistence becomes tiresome. The society of the Middletons, the Palmers, the Steeles, would have provided Colonel Brandon with plenty of opportunity in the same quietly critical vein, without any forfeit of manners ; but no, he merely remains silent, he does not smile, he has to struggle (as Jane Austen observes, on one occasion, of Anne Elliot) against a great tendency to lowness. And his perpetual despondency and diffidence set up a corresponding despondency and diffidence in us on his behalf. If only he would sometimes forget his melancholy and be heartily vulgar, lose his temper, shout, make a bad joke (even a pun would be forgiven him), bang about, break something ; hit Mrs. Ferrars over the head during the painful scene when Elinor's screens are passed around and Marianne bursts into tears—"Colonel Brandon rose up and went to them without knowing what he did"). He remains entirely negative up till the last chapter. Whoever marries the heroine must be either the hero or the villain of a novel, and the rôle of villain is charmingly filled by Willoughby. Then who is the hero ?

Colonel Brandon has another unfortunate tendency which must have gone unobserved by the author, or she would never have permitted it : he pays calls at the wrong moment ; he comes into the room when someone more exciting is expected. This, besides being unfortunate, is also maddening. Three times, no less, while Marianne and Elinor

are staying with Mrs. Jennings in Conduit Street, does Colonel Brandon arrive at a tactless moment, beginning on the very first day of their visit :

Already had Marianne been disappointed more than once by a rap at a neighbouring door, when a loud one was suddenly heard. . . . In the ecstasy of her feelings at that instant she could not help exclaiming, " O Elinor, it is Willoughby, indeed it is ! " and seemed almost ready to throw herself into his arms, when Colonel Brandon appeared.

Now this is one of the things which cannot be prevented in real life ; it *can* be checked in the neighbouring state of fiction. Jane Austen's imagination should have warned her that though a man need not always appear in heroic guise, there are certain moments when he would do better for himself not to appear at all. He might have called that first evening, but it was in Jane Austen's power to slur it over, not to brandish his mistake before our eyes ; to use it as the cause of Marianne's first great shock and disappointment was unforgivable and is one of the chief reasons why I maintain that Colonel Brandon is a failure. Moreover, from the very start he is convinced of the poverty of his chance with Marianne ; over and over again he repeats that he has no hope of success. He cannot be galvanised into any display of spirit or quick action ; even the one incident of orthodox chivalry when, to avenge his ward, he challenges Willoughby to a duel on foreign soil, even that does not quicken our blood or cause us to look at him with more interest ; gloomily he goes abroad ; gloomily runs Willoughby through the arm ; gloomily returns to England again—in time to call on Marianne at an evil hour.

He hardly utters at all. The only place where he talks at great length is in his narrative of the death of his first love, and here he pours out several pages to Elinor, who is an excellent listener. An interesting point is that he never addresses Marianne directly, but always via her elder sister. And when I say " never " and " always ", I mean it literally, after scrupulous research. His is a Miles Standish courtship :

Colonel Brandon, who had a general invitation to the house, was with them almost every day ; he came to look at Marianne and talk to Elinor.

Elinor now began to make the tea, and Marianne was obliged to appear again. After her entrance, Colonel Brandon became more thoughtful and silent than he had been before.

" Then, I must bid you farewell for a longer time than I should wish to do." To Marianne he merely bowed and said nothing.

That he has been allowed eventually to succeed in his melancholy wooing is obviously none of my doing ; but at least, one hundred and thirty-one years after publication, I dare say that it was a bad thing ; I cannot give my willing consent to his marriage with Marianne ; she yielded only in the spirit of gratitude, on the rebound from her agony over Willoughby's inconstancy, and urged on from the best motives by her nearest relations.

Mrs. Dashwood was acting on motives of policy as well as pleasure in the frequency of her visits at Delaford ; for her wish of bringing Marianne and Colonel Brandon together was . . . now her darling object . . . and to see Marianne settled at the Mansion-house was equally the wish of Edward and Elinor. They each felt his sorrows and their own obligations, and Marianne, by general consent, was to be the reward of all . . .

. . . She found herself, at nineteen, submitting to new attachments, entering on new duties, placed in a new home, a wife, the mistress of a family and the patroness of a village.

Very well ; her time was occupied, she was established, and gradually her esteem for her husband must grow into sober affection. We will believe Jane Austen to that extent. No real harm has been done ; Willoughby, had she married him, might have been inconstant, might have been cruel, must have been extravagant and careless ; I think, however, that Marianne's soul would at least not have been damped and stifled. I would sooner have sanctioned her marriage to Willoughby. Yet let nobody say that I always favour the cause of the young and dashing suitor rather than the older man of high principles, sober sense and excellent discretion. Not for one moment would I have come between Emma and Mr. Knightley ; not for one moment could I have borne to see her married, instead, to Frank Churchill. I truly believe it must be that I cannot *like* Colonel Brandon.

## (2) ELEANOR TILNEY

I see no need to correct my tendency to let characters in Jane Austen's novels form themselves into groups and lists. Or rather, I see no need to prevent them from doing so.

Mr. Weston is the chief of the three offenders who prefer all company to the best company (and how wisely Mr. Elliot, even Mr. Elliot, discourages to his cousin Anne on this very subject). But I am led to believe that Mr. Weston is more than just a happy inspiration, by the fact that Miss Austen draws from that model more than once. Bingley and Sir John Middleton help him to form a trio. And each time she recounts

the excesses of their incurably sociable natures, her irony and sense of ridicule are allowed nimble exercise.

Thus I make a guess that Jane herself had, at one time in her keenly observant social career, met a man who amused her by his irrepressible, his indiscriminate taste for a convivial life at all costs. Amused her ; irritated her too, I think, and surprised her, for it is Jane as well as Mr. John Knightley who reflects " That a man who might have spent his evening quietly at home, after a day of business in London, should set off again and walk half a mile to another man's house, for the sake of being in mixed company till bed-time, of finishing his day in the efforts of civility and the noise of numbers, was a circumstance to strike him deeply. A man who had been in motion since eight o'clock in the morning and might now have been still, who had been long talking and might have been silent, who had been in more than one crowd and might have been alone—such a man to quit the tranquillity and independence of his own fireside, and on the evening of a cold, sleety April day rush out again into the world ! . . . John Knightley . . . shrugged his shoulders, and said, ' I could not have believed it even of him ! ' "

Repetition, again, leads me to the idea that Miss Austen knew and appreciated among her acquaintance in real life, a pleasant woman of calm good sense whose company and advice must have been profitable wherever she went ; for directly I visualise this personality, I see it multiplied : Mrs. Croft, Mrs. Weston, Mrs. Grant, Mrs. Gardiner, Mrs. Morland. All married, you see ; not likely that they would remain unsought ; each has found a husband worthy of her merits ; except Mrs. Grant, who married a paunch, and perhaps less wise than her prototypes, indulged him a little too much, till by way of three great institutional dinners in one week, the paunch led to his death ; but even then, she was not left solitary, for her lively young half-sister Mary was glad, we are told, to find a home with her for some years after the *dénouement* of *Mansfield Park* has swept Edmund for ever from her fancy. Mary was happy enough with Mrs. Grant. (These five ladies, besides being good home-makers, were also sympathetic to young people. Emma perpetually sought the society of Mrs. Weston, who had been her governess, Miss Taylor. Elizabeth was never happier than when invited by her aunt, Mrs. Gardiner, to accompany her on a tour of Derbyshire and the Lakes. (Mrs. Croft was a favourite with all the young naval officers of her husband's calling, and Anne, too, took an instant liking for that kind, weather-beaten woman.) Mrs. Grant, we have already seen in another chapter, made herself popular, not only with her own young relatives, but with the young Bettrams as well, during the

*Mansfield Park* theatricals. And Mrs. Morland, who must have been rather older than the other four, treated her growing family with such steady affection, mingled with cheerful everyday philosophy over the accidents that befell them, that we can easily forgive her one lapse in imagination, when she lectured Catherine on what she supposed was discontent with her simple home after the grandeurs of a visit to Northanger Abbey, whereas we know, and Mrs. Morland might have guessed, that Catherine was suffering from the pains of love and the ignominy of her sudden, too violent banishment by General Tilney.

When this chapter was first planned, it was meant to be on what S. K.-S. and I would have called Jane Austen's failures, were it not that failure is too drastic a word for expressing those slight lapses from perfection (except Colonel Brandon ; I maintain that Colonel Brandon was worse than a slight lapse). But having made Colonel Tilney my second selection, I discovered with some surprise, on pondering the matter, that the failure of conception was not in the General himself, but rather in his daughter Eleanor, and in the whole episode of Catherine's expulsion from the Abbey. The General himself is drawn with fair consistency. He is what we should call nowadays a stuffed shirt, or rather, a stuffed uniform. An oily man, of no real value ; a blatant snob puffed up by vanity ; a humbug ; a bad-tempered old ass. Except in this matter of temper, I mentally bracket him with Sir Walter Elliot ; they are of roughly the same age, both handsome, both snobbish, both vain ; but both, I venture to think, manageable by adult understanding, as men of intelligence very frequently are : you have only to press the right spring and they will respond. Mrs. Clay, for instance, knew exactly how to deal with the baronet, and so did her father, Mr. Shepherd, the attorney, when he persuaded Sir Walter to let Kellynch to an Admiral because Naval men were the best tenants. Sir Walter had a more glossy and complacent surface than General Tilney ; we never see him in a rage, merely a degree haughtier, otherwise they are a pair. Both frequenters of the best Bath society, it seems a pity they never met. But how strange and disappointing that the General's son and daughter, Henry and Eleanor, both endowed with humour and intelligence, should have found no finally successful method of handling this conceited, stupid, noisy old donkey who was their father. Henry was perfectly able to translate and debunk him to Catherine afterwards, when the old boy had been again talking through his cocked hat :

" Well, well, we will take our chance some one of those days. There is no need to fix. You are not to put yourself at all out of your way. Whatever you may happen to have in the house will

be enough. I think I can answer for the young ladies making allowance for a bachelor's table . . ."

" . . . I must go away directly, two days before I intended it."

"Go away!" said Catherine, with a very long face; "and why?"

"Why! How can you ask the question? Because no time is to be lost in frightening my old house-keeper out of her wits, because I must go and prepare a dinner for you, to be sure."

"Oh! not seriously!"

"Ay, and sadly too, for I had much rather stay."

"But how can you think of such a thing after what the general said—when he so particularly desired you not to give yourself any trouble, because *anything* would do?" Henry only smiled.

Surely, too, Eleanor, his favourite child, knowing him as she did, quietly accepting him, understanding and making the best of him, surely she could have devised a more resourceful way to help Catherine and save her from the humiliation of being turned out of the Abbey than flurried weeping, turmoil and apology?

(There must be limits to acquiescence.) (Elinor Dashwood) could never have tolerated without remonstrance what was plainly intolerable, even from a parent to whom respect was due; (Elizabeth Bennet) does not hesitate to beg her father for more severe restriction of Lydia's behaviour when she considers that his ironic detachment is letting matters slip a little too far. (And Anne Elliot, gentle as she ever was, yet in the Octagon Room at Bath on the evening of the concert, stood firm in her intention to speak to Captain Wentworth—"in spite of the formidable father and sister in the background . . . she knew nothing of their looks, and felt equal to everything which she believed right to be done". In other words, even in 1798 you must not continually back up your parents when their manners and behaviour are outrageous)

Although Miss Tilney lacks the high spirit of Emma, the lively audacity of Elizabeth, the careless courage of Marianne, she is still no Fanny Price; I had placed her, till she defaulted, in the same group with Elinor Dashwood and Anne Elliot. And the author herself is attached to her:

The marriage of Eleanor Tilney . . . is an event which I expect to give general satisfaction among all her acquaintance. My own joy on the occasion is very sincere. I know no one more entitled . . . to receive and enjoy felicity.

She is revealed with a mind of her own, a resourcefulness dictated by good breeding, a poise which apparently came easy to her. All this goes to pieces when confronted with her father's not in the least unusual

fit of temper. If we are to go on liking her, as we were meant to do, she should have protested more strongly when the General arrived home in the late evening and ordered her to be instantly quit of Catherine. She might so easily have declined to accompany him on his hasty project of a visit to Lord Longtown; had she gone on to mention, as casually as possible, that his character would suffer with the Marquis of Longtown, the Lady Frasers, General Courteney, and all the rest of the county when the rumour got about of his arbitrary treatment of a guest under his roof, I do not believe for a single moment that the General would have been able to withstand such an argument for the expedience of retracting his gross incivility towards a young girl whom he had himself invited, most pressingly, to visit Northanger Abbey. A shallow character, he was yet a man of the world; and a man of the world knows that society will set a limit to downright bad behaviour, under whatever stress. A girl of fine breeding like Eleanor would wish to save her father, in spite of himself, from violating hospitality to that crazy extent. He would thank her afterwards—though never, perhaps, aloud.

I believe I can hear you say that it is easy to be destructive, but can I suggest something constructive, and still let the story run up to its peak and climax and through it and down the slope on the other side, as in its existing admirable conclusion? I think so, yes. The situation itself is, of course, wholly of the period; it is surprising that Catherine's mother can perceive how no more than convention and manners had been outraged, and her daughter none the worse for the experience. Nevertheless: "Mr. and Mrs. Morland could not but feel that it might have been productive of much unpleasantness to her; that it was what they could never have voluntarily suffered." Young ladies of seventeen, in 1798, did not travel alone for many hours in a hack post-chaise, and Eleanor Tilney (I have by now argued myself into a state of some indignation), if she could do no better, if she could not succeed in cancelling her father's preposterous orders, should herself have accompanied Catherine on the long, lonely journey, and delivered her safely to her parents' home at Fullerton. She could do no less. Catherine did not seek protection, but she was entitled to it, and her young hostess knew this perfectly well: "a journey of seventy miles, to be taken post by you, at your age, alone, unattended!"—So that her surrender is not filial obedience but unpardonable weakness. And in contrast, a finer loyalty sprang to my mind; and words came flying from an earlier story: comforting words, a brave resolution from another girl defying the father whose rage has similarly pronounced harsh banishment on the friend she loved:

CELIA : . . . Prithee, be cheerful, know'st thou not, the duke  
Hath banish'd me, his daughter ?

ROSALIND : That he hath not.

CELIA : No, hath not ? Rosalind lacks then the love  
Which teacheth thee that you and I am one :  
Shall we be sunder'd ? shall we part, sweet girl ?  
No ; let my father seek another heir.  
Therefore devise with me how we may fly,  
Whither to go, and what to bear with us :  
And do not seek to take your change upon you,  
To bear your griefs yourself and leave me out ;  
For, by this heaven, now at our sorrows pale,  
Say what thou canst, I'll go along with thee.

We have, then, already two alternatives for Eleanor ; herself to accompany Catherine home, or a suggestion to her father as to what verdict his conduct would earn him among his noble friends in the county. Now here is a third proposal : Her brother Henry, she must have known, would have dealt with the rumpus ; he would not for a moment have tolerated such a breach of decent hospitality. In modern fiction, naturally, what the French would call " a little blow of the telephone " would have dissipated all need for further action. Eleanor had the whole night in which to review the situation, give orders on her own initiative to the servants, who, I am persuaded, were devoted to her and would gladly have taken any contradiction to the orders of their irascible master. Why, then, had she not quietly sent one of them as messenger to Woodston, not more than fourteen miles away, summoning Henry to come home at once ? No, it was a Saturday night ; this would not do ; Henry had his sermon to consider on Sunday morning. If Eleanor had accompanied Catherine in the chaise which (we are particularly told) passed the turning that led to Woodston, they could have alighted there, and with the utmost propriety have stayed with Henry at the parsonage until his Sabbath duties were over, and he could have left them comfortably installed and returned himself to Northanger Abbey for a glorious scene of expostulation and wrath with the General.

But meanwhile, you will be asking, what becomes of the original plot ? Have you not been too drastic in your attempt to save Miss Tilney from a futility inconsistent with the author's earlier conception of her character ? And do you wish to lay axe to Catherine's arrival home, her silence, her sorrowful restlessness, and Mrs. Morland applying an essay in *The Mirror* as remedy ? Can you possibly contemplate sacrificing that peerless description of their visit to the Allens, where



we hear that Mrs. Allen thought Mr. Allen's expressions "quite good enough to be immediately made use of again by herself. His wonder, his conjectures, and his explanations, became in succession hers, with the addition of this single remark—'I really have not patience with the general'—to fill up every accidental pause. And 'I really have not patience with the general' was uttered twice after Mr. Allen left the room, without any relaxation of anger, or any material digression of thought."

No, we cannot endure that any word spoken by Mrs. Allen should be lost to posterity. Nor do I wish for a purely passive heroine. Catherine is a girl of spirit, she has pride, she is not likely to sit by tamely while Henry goes to intercede for her with the General. The situation is past bearing for a young girl of any delicacy. Her confiding heart has been too severely wounded. Let her then escape from Eleanor at Woodston and, without waiting for Henry to return from his interview, make the best of a solitary journey home. We have, in short, exactly the same story as conceived and presented by Miss Austen, except that we have cut out the scene where the two girls say good-bye to each other, and have begged her to supply, instead, a scene to fill in the lines :

Henry's indignation on hearing how Catherine had been treated, on comprehending his father's views, and being ordered to acquiesce in them, had been open and bold. . . . He steadily refused to accompany his father into Herefordshire—an engagement formed almost at the moment, to promote the dismissal of Catherine—and as steadily declared his intention of offering her his hand. The general was furious in his anger, and they parted in dreadful disagreement. Henry, in an agitation of mind which many solitary hours were required to compose, had returned almost instantly to Woodston :—(all we need insert here is that he found his Catherine already gone)—and on the afternoon of the following day had begun his journey to Fullerton.

That is one version. Whether both girls escape from the Abbey to Henry's house, or whether Eleanor, by not yielding to her father, succeeds in her influence so that he withdraws his dictate, and then finds that Catherine herself is too proud to stay, either way Eleanor would have saved herself. She, not the General, is the failure of this book, responsible for our uneasy feeling that something has gone wrong with the theme. She had not the excuse for filial trepidation that Elizabeth Barrett could well have pleaded : the General was not sinister and soft of foot. With him, noise was probably the worst of it ; dive under that as under a crashing wave, take a long breath, and you would have

been all right. A daughter might well have been afraid of Mr. Bennet, who had brains and a sarcastic tongue and knew where best to deal a hurt. But General Tilney—why, he is a child—not a very nice child—and his faults are bragging, childish faults. Remember how triumphant and pleased he was at learning that Mr. Allen of Fullerton had the smaller drawing-room and only one inferior hothouse. I am inclined to think, myself, that the General's worst moments were not when he lost his temper after a diet of John Thorpe's malicious dish of lies, not when he shouted impatiently at the waiters at the inn, or made an unpleasant bustle and hullabaloo when they left Bath for Northanger ; such a man of straw could not have actually terrified the most timid son and daughter, and the young Tilneys had shown themselves by no means lacking in moral strength or a sense of proportion. Their worst moments must certainly have been when the General was making himself effusively amiable. He had an overdone style in compliment :

“ . . . Can you, in short, be prevailed on to quit this scene of public triumph, and oblige your friend Eleanor with your company in Gloucestershire ? I am almost ashamed to make the request, though its presumption would certainly appear greater to every creature in Bath than yourself. Modesty such as yours—but not for the world would I pain it by open praise.”

Henry and Eleanor must have blushed for their father oftener than they quaked before him ; and he became even more embarrassing when he tried to further Henry's cause with Catherine, assuming her to be Mr. Allen's heiress and an advantageous connection :

“ . . . What a pity not to have it fitted up ! It is the prettiest room I ever saw ; it is the prettiest room in the world ! ”

“ I trust,” said the general, with a most satisfied smile, “ that it will very speedily be furnished : it waits only for a lady's taste.”

“ Well, if it was my house, I should never sit anywhere else. Oh, what a sweet little cottage there is among the trees—apple-trees too ! It is the prettiest cottage——”

“ You like it—you approve it as an object ; it is enough.—Henry, remember that Robinson is spoken to about it. The cottage remains.”

I am aware of the storm that I must be drawing down upon myself from worshippers of Jane Austen, who will not allow one tiny flaw anywhere in their idol's six works of genius, her six clear little masterpieces. For my audacity in venturing to challenge even one incident of one of these works, they are bound to exclaim : “ Words fail me ! ” and, indeed, I hope for my own sake that it will be so, for I am no heroine and shrink from a voice loud with indignation ; by which

you may perceive that in my heart I have, after all, the deepest sympathy with Eleanor Tilney, for, to say the least of it, the General must have been capable of no end of a bellow.

### (3) LADY CATHERINE DE BOURGH

When we meet with rudeness we are amazed. That is a reaction which does not alter in the social history of any period. We are hardly amazed when we discover that our fellow human beings can be cruel, selfish, greedy, false, cowardly, treacherous—but rudeness is different; rudeness staggers us like a blow across the eyes; not when reported at third hand, but when we encounter it face to face, we think: “This cannot be true; he (or she) cannot *really* be saying this; I have not *really* heard it!” But it is true, and they have said it, and what is more, by the time you have recovered from the first shock, they will probably be saying it again with richer variations, richer and ruder.

I am puzzled as to exactly why we should be incredulous over sheer rudeness. It is, I suppose, only a minor crime. The explanation may be that courtesy, breeding, good manners, delicacy, are qualifications that civilisation has taught itself, and represent so much territory won by our own efforts from the primitive, the animal kingdom. Therefore we are more shocked by its violation, for it means that we have slid backwards again; animals, you see, are never rude, for they are never courteous; neither comes within their range of expression or behaviour. I am preparing for outbursts of contradiction from the owners of exquisitely courteous bulldogs and borzois, pointing out the flat and deliberate rudeness of apes and monkeys and baboons. But naturally “rude”, in this context, is to indicate conscious discourtesy in speech and manner, not gross but unconscious misconduct in the drawing-room when it should have been out-of-doors. In the four-footed animal kingdom, we share such qualities as cruelty, greed, lack of affection, ingratitude, stupidity, and most crimes, major and minor, which are also to be found in the category of human beings; but to read of good behaviour under severe stress, as shown by Elinor Dashwood, Jane Bennet and Anne Elliot, fills us with a sort of subdued triumph, as who should say: look, we have advanced even as far as here! This is indeed to be civilised; queens have behaved with grace and good manners on their way to the block or tumbril, though fully conscious of their fate in every nerve; not like calves, poor things, bleating and perplexed, bundled off under nets for their ride to the slaughter-house.

So I think this may translate into a plausible enough reason, why I am so profoundly shocked whenever Lady Catherine de Bourgh appears

on the scene in *Pride and Prejudice*, and why I count her as one of Jane Austen's failures. For she reminds me of our constant reversion to beast-hood, all the more so as the author does not seem to share the same shock. She knows Lady Catherine is outrageous, she has wilfully created her outrageous, and is dryly amused at Elizabeth's perfect composure against the elder lady's repeated barbarian attacks. I should enjoy it all better myself could I be assured that Lady Catherine was pure fiction, an Aunt Sally for Elizabeth's shies, a monster of the creative imagination; but Miss Austen is a realist; I am afraid she must have met Lady Catherine; yet I maintain (and this is where my collaborator, Sheila Kaye-Smith, disagrees with me) that out of sheer high spirits she must have over-exaggerated the original. No real person, peeress or charwoman, has ever been quite as rude.

Or perhaps I have been lucky in my encounters; perhaps there *are* titled ladies in sables and plumes and sealskin coats, purple in the face, shaking their ebony stick, clotted and congested with fury because their nephew dares, without consulting them, make a misalliance. Argument sways to and fro . . . Sheila has put forward her ideas on the subject with such excellent conviction and logic; with authority too, and I am nearly always toppled from my seat by a tone of quiet authority. I had better have another look at *Pride and Prejudice*; re-read that last scene where Lady Catherine calls at Longbourn and talks with Elizabeth alone in the "prettyish kind of a little wilderness":

" . . . Heaven and earth! of what are you thinking? Are the shades of Pemberley to be thus polluted? . . . Unfeeling, selfish girl! Do you not consider that a connection with you must disgrace him in the eyes of everybody?"

No, I am not wrong. This is certainly the style in which indignant parents and elderly relations in melodrama spoke to the erring maiden who was about to thrust herself by timely marriage into their noble house. Duchesses have been reported to take a strong line under these circumstances. And do not forget Armand's father in *La Dame aux Camellias*. But Elizabeth Bennet quite a different matter; Elizabeth Bennet was far from being an erring maiden, nor a vulgar actress (vulgar according to the period); she was, as she coolly remarked herself, a gentleman's daughter. Moreover, her affair with Darcy had been conducted with the utmost propriety, unlike poor Marguerite Gautier with her Armand. Lady Catherine had, therefore, none of the usual justification for her remarks, nor for her attitude. We can hardly believe that she and Darcy's mother, Lady Anne, were brought up together in the same household with the same education, according to

the same standards ; one lady is a mere tough, belonging entirely to the formula of crude fiction ; the other, if we can judge at all by her son and daughter, to the aristocratic gentlefolk of the late eighteenth century. There is more difference than would appear from the syllables, between an aristocrat and an autocrat.

Also it is far easier to give credence to insults spoken in rage. But Lady Catherine arrived in cold blood at the Bennet house, after a long drive ; she was not in a rage, she was rude, plain rude, unbelievably rude.

Turning back to our first introduction to the lady, we are ready to believe that she might have been originally conceived as a character credible though unpleasant :

Lady Catherine was a tall, large woman, with strongly-marked features, which might once have been handsome. Her air was not conciliating, nor was her manner of receiving them such as to make her visitors forget their inferior rank. She was not rendered formidable by silence, but whatever she said was spoken in so authoritative a tone as marked her self-importance.

Yes, well, we have met such personalities. This shows us a familiar Lady Catherine ; we have always been glad to escape from her, but undoubtedly she exists ; and the author's summing-up is shrewd and concise, and without exaggeration. Apparently, too, a little further on in the book, Lady Catherine shows herself aware that there really are certain things which are not said, and capable of checking herself :

"Do you play and sing, Miss Bennet ?"

"A little."

"Oh, then, some time or other we shall be happy to hear you.

Our instrument is a capital one, probably superior to——" (to any *you've* ever played on !).

She is not, therefore, altogether stupid and blunted. And we can forgive Miss Austen a great deal, for her caustic conclusion to an evening's pleasure at Rosings : "The party then gathered round the fire to hear Lady Catherine determine what weather they were to have on the morrow." If only she could have continued in this strain. Presently occurs another phrase of the true Jane Austen satire which says so little and conveys so much :

Whenever any of the cottagers were disposed to be quarrelsome, discontented, or too poor, she sallied forth into the village to settle their differences, silence their complaints, and scold them into harmony and plenty.

Soon, however, we must begin to be a little troubled :

"I have told Miss Bennet several times that she will never play really well unless she practises more ; and . . . she is very welcome . . . to play on the pianoforte in Mrs. Jenkinson's room. She would be in nobody's way, you know, in that part of the house."

Mr. Darcy, however, shares our discomfort ; he "looked a little ashamed of his aunt's ill-breeding"—So, supported by him, we can read on tranquilly—until we are suddenly shattered by certain remarks in the first half of the letter of Darcy's proposal to Elizabeth : we realise that he is his aunt's own nephew, and can be, when his vanity is struck, as rude, though perhaps not quite so crude, as his relative. It does not make us like Lady Catherine any the more ; but we are disposed to remember (as we are now reading *Pride and Prejudice* for at least the twentieth time) that correction by love and intelligence of just this outstanding fault in our haughty hero's character is the theme of the book. And his humility later on, his earnest desire to amend and to put himself right, are such as will for ever separate him, in our estimation, from his Aunt Catherine ; just as her final scene with Elizabeth for ever prevents us not only from any possible liking, but also from any possible belief that such a preposterous woman could ever have existed. Before that, a scene occurs in which her conceit displays itself in a speech more touching than otherwise ; for conceited people are frequently touching in their bland *naïveté* :

"I believe nobody feels the loss of friends so much as I do. But I am particularly attached to these young men, and know them to be so much attached to me. They were excessively sorry to go. But so they always are . . . Darcy seemed to feel it most acutely—more, I think, than last year. His attachment to Rosings certainly increases."

Her affection for her nephews, and for her niece Georgiana, is not altogether pride, for she appears quite fond of her sickly daughter, too. Yet the point at issue is not whether we can discover any good qualities in Lady Catherine, but whether she exists as a three-dimensional figure of life, or merely as a synthetic production which either does not come to life at all, or comes to too much life and none of it any good.

There are no other characters in Jane Austen who so shock us by their rudeness ; General Tilney's actions and his commands are violent and deplorable, but he is not actually in so many words rude to Catherine Morland, nor to anyone else ; mostly he butters them up, but lapses into an occasional off-scene roar when he loses control of his temper. Mrs. Ferrars, Edward's mother in *Sense and Sensibility*, is rude but cannot make us suffer, for she is a faded little figure of no importance whatsoever, a puppet parent, invented to prevent a puppet Edward from being happy

with his Elinor for as long as possible. We are only mildly astonished at the pointed way at which she slights Elinor, at the Dashwoods' dinner-party, by ceasing to take interest in the painted screens directly she hears whose work they are. In a minor degree, I should say that she, as well as Lady Catherine de Bourgh, may count as a Jane Austen failure. But her lack of civility is painted in greys and drabs, where Lady Catherine's is a positive shock in strident purple.

✓ Rudeness counts indeed as an occasion for severe treatment, from Jane Austen's own point of view ; if committed by one of her favourites, by Marianne or Emma, she will not pass it by, but immediately brings in an older and more sophisticated character to rap them sharply over the knuckles. Emma, over-excited by Frank Churchill's conversation and the general tenseness of the atmosphere at the Box Hill picnic, is disgracefully saucy to Miss Bates ; and directly we see Mr. Knightley stride, tall and terrible, towards her carriage, we are sure she is not to be allowed to get off scot-free. Mr. John Knightley at one moment verges on rudeness towards his father-in-law, Mr. Woodhouse, and for that very reason he is not a first favourite with Emma herself ; as for Marianne, it is as well for her that she has an elder sister who will darn, as with invisible mending, the sad rents torn in the surrounding fabric by the younger girl's complete lack of what politeness is, due to her hosts and acquaintances. But at least we can grant this to Marianne : she is never rude to her own family. Which brings us to a fascinated contemplation of Mrs. Norris. The things her Aunt Norris says to Fanny Price are quite beyond belief—and yet (here is the strange difference) we do believe them. "Remember, Fanny, wherever you are, you must be the lowest and last." . . . Poor little Fanny is used to such attacks, but we reel and can barely recover ourselves in time to eat our mutton with Dr. Grant. But Fanny is Mrs. Norris's niece ; and when it is a case of rudeness among relations, we deplore it, we shrink, we pray ineffectually that it may stop, but we can accept it. I do not remember that Mrs. Norris was particularly rude to anyone else. But towards Fanny she seems to have been irritated into more than a usual vehement desire to scold ; towards Fanny she displays actual sadism. I am afraid Fanny maddens her, not alone because the girl is poor and dependent, but because she shrinks and creeps about. This is the ABC of psychology ; the author is as clearly aware as ourselves that the Fannies of this world are bound to arouse the sadism of every Aunt Norris, who can only be managed if you are able to stand up to her.

"What else have you been spunging ?" said Maria . . .

"Spunging, my dear !" . . .

And no more than that, though we hold our breath, expecting Maria to be slaughtered. But Fanny had no notion how to handle her Aunt Norris; and by the time Susan Price arrives at Mansfield Park with bolder looks, Mrs. Norris "felt her as a spy, and an intruder, and an indigent niece, and everything most odious".

Mrs. Norris was insufferable, certainly; self-important, officious, a snob, mean, greedy, prejudiced, unkind (to Fanny), but she belongs to the kingdom of reality. We never lose sight of a live woman as she goes about her business to and fro between her cottage and Mansfield Park. She breathes, she bustles, she is full of plans and energy; she walks uphill to save the horses, and tells us about it twenty times afterwards; she foils the base plot of the carpenter's family to obtain a free lunch for their little boy up at the great house (and we hear about that, too, several times); beyond all else, she is triumphant at having arranged the ill-fated marriage between her favourite Maria and the rich Mr. Rushworth. By her clever contrivance, she was able to save "full three quarters of a yard" of the green baize curtain for the theatricals. She is the perfect Gougusse, the clown in the French circus who rushes round energetically performing labours which others have already just performed. She is insufferable, but she is immortal; we would not have missed her for a whole world of nobler, sweeter characters; and though we share everybody's intense relief when, in the last chapters, she resolves to quit Mansfield, her removal being "a great supplementary comfort to Sir Thomas's life", we shall always remember Mrs. Norris, not only as providing us with immense entertainment, but also with that curious satisfaction to our deeply buried literary sense that here all is well, she harmonises with our knowledge of the truth, and Jane Austen herself does no more than justice to her better qualities:

Mrs. Price "was a manager by necessity, without any of Mrs. Norris's inclination for it, or any of her activity. . . . She might have made just as good a woman of consequence as Lady Bertram, but Mrs. Norris would have been a more respectable mother of nine children on a small income."

And by this comparison, I still declare Lady Catherine de Bourgh as one of Jane Austen's failures. A stately insolence in the grand manner would have preserved her from a place in the black list. And by the grand manner, I do *not* mean: "Are the shades of Pemberley to be thus polluted!"

#### (b) SHEILA KAYE-SMITH

The fact that I cannot make a kettle—or a mattress—or a table—or a pair of tongs does not inhibit me from criticising any kettle or mattress



or table or tongs that I find defective, and were I to return one of these articles to the makers on the ground of some fault in its construction I should not expect to be greeted with any such retort as "Yah ! See if you could make one half so good yourself."

I say this to have an answer ready for anyone who thinks that my own defects as a writer make it the height of impudence for me to see any faults in the novels of Jane Austen. I have already been told that this chapter is "most unwise" and that indignant Janeites will fall upon me not so much in defence of their idol as in chastisement of my own shortcomings. All I can say is that I am not writing now as a novelist, but as a reader, as an ordinary user of the article. I write also as a lover of Jane Austen, and any criticism is part of my tribute. There is nothing more devastating to the integrity of the object, or the intelligence of the subject, than a totally uncritical admiration.

✓ Moreover, any consideration of Jane Austen's defects as a novelist shows at once how extraordinarily few there are. She is one of the most consistent, "finished", careful, convincing and generally "perfect" writers that we possess. That is, of course, the opinion of her admirers. With others, I own, the situation is reversed and she has few virtues. Her characters are stiff, her plots are artificial, her style is pompous, her moral outlook is old-fashioned and her snobbery is outrageous. From this attitude, as I have already said, there are seldom any conversions—nor do her followers frequently fall from grace. It is a personal affair, with a psychological rather than a literary explanation.

The only general fault I will allow her is a clumsy, over-colloquial, under-ungrammatical style, and a certain stiffness in conversation. But when one has read many novels of the same period one realises that the style is that of her contemporaries—no worse than any and better than most. "Johnsonese" was dying out in its extreme form, but the English language was still over-Latinised, and in comparison with others Jane is refreshingly free of clichés on one hand and purple passages on the other. She is also at times astonishingly vivid, with a gift of expression and a sense of the right word which make one realise that had she lived at a better period of English, either earlier or later, her style would have been more on a level with her other gifts.

✓ Perhaps greatest of these gifts is her power of giving life to an imaginary society. Therefore it is here—in her creation of human beings, in her delineation of character—that a failure would be most noticeable. I do not think there are many failures of this kind, but there certainly are a few, though these are, as might have been expected, to be found mostly in her earlier novels and among her minor characters.

One example that comes immediately to mind is Mary Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*. As the only plain member of the Bennet family she is in an interesting if not congenial situation and might have had a significant or at least lively part to play. But one's recollections of Mary at the end of the book amount to little more than a few dull, ridiculous moralisings delivered at intervals between which we forget absolutely all about her. All the other Bennet girls are very much alive—even the characterless Kitty is alive in her peevish, ineffective way. But Mary, much more definitely conceived, never, in the expressive phrase of a friend of mine, "gets up off the page". She is in two dimensions only, an inhabitant of "Flatland". We are told that she was plain and "made extracts", and every now and then she behaves in keeping with her character as family bluestocking; but as she does practically nothing else one can hardly avoid the conclusion that she is of as little interest to the author as she is to the reader.

She is much less successful than that other "extra" member of a family—Margaret Dashwood, in *Sense and Sensibility*. For Margaret, though very much in the background, as indeed was her place (*vide* Mary Crawford) as the only sister not "out", is essentially a human being and not merely a character in a book—an unformed, well-meaning, good-natured human being, without much personality as yet, but nevertheless alive in three dimensions. It would seem that if a character is to be kept in the background and allowed only a few appearances, reality is better served by a certain faintness of outline than by giving that character a single, definite quality. It is like hiding a miniature under a huge label or over-seasoning a delicate sauce. Bold effects are successful only when the material gives scope for them.

The failure of two other characters in *Sense and Sensibility* is due to other causes—chiefly to the very understandable one of youth and inexperience. In many ways this is the least experienced of the novels, as it is in essence the earliest, and it is not as surprising that we have some unsuccessful portraits as that we have so few. G. B. Stern has dealt with Colonel Brandon, so I will mention only Mr. and Mrs. Palmer.

This couple is quite incredible. Or rather, he is, for she is incredible only in relation to him. We all know the pretty, silly, kind-hearted woman, to whom we can "forgive everything except her laugh"; and it is certainly not beyond nature to find her giving her husband credit for virtues he does not possess. But Mr. Palmer is so unbelievable in his rudeness—whether negatively expressed by silence (when calling on Mrs. Dashwood and her daughters he "entered the room with a look of self-consequence, slightly bowed to the ladies, without speaking a word, and after briefly surveying them and their apartments, took

up a newspaper from the table, and continued to read it as long as he stayed ") or positively by a sneer (" I did not know I contradicted anyone in calling your Mother ill-bred ")—that his wife's flattery and praise become unbelievable too. His character has a basis in nature—an intelligent, fundamentally kind-hearted man, exasperated into boorishness by the vulgarity and folly of his relations—and neither he nor his wife are one-dimensional like Mary Bennet. But his presentation is uncertain—he is obviously an early, fumbling attempt at the delineation of eccentricity, and he fails to come alive because his creator fails to make us quite believe in him.

This failure is obviously due to inexperience, and as the part he has to play in *Sense and Sensibility* is not much greater than that of Mary Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* it does very little to impair the integrity of the book. (But I now come to a very different sort of failure—a failure in the presentation of an important character by an author of experience. Jane Austen's greatest and most mysterious failure is, in my opinion, the presentation of Lady Russell in *Persuasion*.

(Lady Russell is an important character ; she plays no secondary part but is essential to the presentation and development of the story. It was her persuasion which lay at the root of all Anne Elliot's troubles and gave, indeed, its title to the book. So it is essential that we should know her well if we are to believe in the situation. Any failure in her presentation involves not only herself but the book as a whole. I have read it again and again, but never once does (for me, at least) Lady Russell come alive, nor is her influence on Anne both before and after the story begins really made clear. To the reader she is a dummy, without personality or vitality ; nor does it even appear that she has ever been really alive to the author herself.

I think her failure is due almost entirely to Jane's method of presenting her, in which there is a very important difference from her normal custom. Lady Russell is almost the only important character who does not *present herself* in speech. How do we best come to know Mrs. Bennet, Mr. Collins, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, Mrs. Norris, Mr. Woodhouse, Isabella Thorpe, all the members in fact of that inimitable society ? It is not through the author's description of them, though she often introduces them with a brief, descriptive paragraph, nor is it even through the comments and reactions of other characters, though these are sometimes a powerful indication. It is through their own speech. ) What should we know of Mrs. Bennet, for instance, if all we had of her was a few scraps of dialogue and Jane's own account of her as " a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper. When she was discontented, she fancied herself nervous.

The business of her life was to get her daughters married ; its solace was visiting and news " ?

This is, of course, an admirable précis of Mrs. Bennet. But does she come alive in it ? And how much should we make of it if we had not already had her exposure of herself in her entreaties to Mr. Bennet to call on Bingley ? In fact, the paragraph, accurate pointer as it is, could be entirely deleted without our losing a single breath of Mrs. Bennet's life, but the same could not be said of a phrase of her conversation. She is built up of a series of ridiculous remarks, irrational arguments, irritating yet almost endearingly ludicrous reactions. Listen to her talking to Lady Lucas at the Netherfield Ball (even though we blush for her with Elizabeth), follow her commentary on Mr. Collins's proposal, Lydia's elopement, and the engagements of Jane and Elizabeth, down to the final : " A house in town ! Everything that is charming ! Three daughters married ! Ten thousand a year ! O Lord ! what will become of me ? I shall go distracted," and see if you do not have in all this talk the essential Mrs. Bennet without need of further description.

The same could be said of Mr. Woodhouse. Little of his individuality and none of his charm is in his introduction as Emma's father. " She dearly loved her father, but he was no companion for her. He could not meet her in conversation, rational or playful. The evil of the actual disparity in their ages (and Mr. Woodhouse had not married early) was much increased by his constitution and habits ; for having been a valetudinarian all his life, without activity of mind or body, he was a much older man in ways than in years ; and though everywhere beloved for the friendliness of his heart and his amiable temper, his talents could not have commended him at any time."

It is not here that we meet and love him. He lives in a flow of gentle talk—in expressions of courtesy and affection, of regard for old friends ; in encomiums on gruel, in anxiety for the fatigues of his coachman and horses travelling half a mile, for the dangers of his daughter venturing alone to dine with friends ; in his concern for his own health, Emma's health, Isabella's health, the children's health, Jane Fairfax's health ( " My dear, did you change your stockings ? " ), everybody's health, even Mr. Knightley's ; in his tender gallantry towards womanhood even when so unattractively embodied as in Mrs. Elton ; in his uncritical admiration of those he loves and his shocked recoil from those who would treat frivolously such solemn subjects as draughts and open windows ( " That young man is very thoughtless. Do not tell his father, but that young man is not quite the thing. He has been opening the doors very often this evening, and keeping them open very inconsiderately. He does not think of the draught. I do not mean

to set you against him, but indeed he is not quite the thing.") He is almost entirely presented in conversation, and it is through hearing him talk that we come to know him, which is the method by which in real life we come to know our friends.

(But of Lady Russell we have little more than the formal introduction. "She was a benevolent, charitable, good woman, and capable of strong attachments, most correct in her conduct, strict in her notions of decorum, and with manners that were held a standard of good breeding. She had a cultivated mind ; but she had prejudices on the side of ancestry—she had a value for rank and consequence which blinded her a little to the faults of those who possessed them.")

(This is the usual correct, workmanlike description of a character already conceived in the author's brain and waiting only to be born into a book. But in this case the birth is a still one. I do not mean that Lady Russell does not play her part in the story—she advises on Sir Walter's retrenchments, she takes charge of Anne, conveys her to Uppercross, has her to stay with her at Kellynch Lodge, conveys her to Bath, takes her out there, lends her her carriage to call on Mrs. Smith, characteristically approves of Sir Walter's seeking out Lady Dalrymple and Miss Carteret. We hear much, too, of her affection for Anne and Anne's devotion to her. But throughout it all she remains a character in a book. She seems, in fact, imprisoned in the narrative—we get no personal escape in speech.)

(Lady Russell, indeed, scarcely speaks at all, which makes her very unlike the majority of Jane Austen characters, though *Persuasion* probably contains less dialogue and more narrative than the other novels. I can recall barely half a dozen conversations with Lady Russell in person. And it is not till quite far on in the story, when Anne, after all her adventures at Uppercross and Lyme, has come to stay at Kellynch Lodge, that she makes her first utterance : " I must call on Mrs. Croft ; I really must call on her soon. Anne, have you courage to go with me, and pay a visit in that house ? It will be some trial to us both.")

(The visit is paid, but Lady Russell takes no recorded part in the conversation, though later on, when Mary and Charles Musgrove call at the Lodge with news of the friends at Lyme, she makes a few discreet remarks, and once we are told " could not help laughing ". Again, after a visit to the Musgrove family at Uppercross, she says : " I hope I shall remember in future not to call at Uppercross in the Christmas holidays." After which she says no more till she and Anne have been some time in Bath, when she advises her that " if Mr. Elliot should some time pay his addresses to you, and if you should be disposed to accept him, I think there would be every possibility of you being happy

together". Her last recorded speech is when, after disconcerting Anne by apparently contemplating Captain Wentworth for some time from her carriage, she says: "You will wonder what has been fixing my eye so long; but I was looking after some window-curtains, which Lady Alicia and Mrs. Frankland were telling me of last night. They described the drawing-room window-curtains of one of the houses on this side of the way, and this part of the street, as being the handsomest and best hung of any in Bath, but could not recollect the exact number, and I have been trying to find out which it could be; but I confess I can see no curtains hereabouts that answer to their description.")

(And this is literally all we have by way of dialogue from a character of major importance in the story.) She has less to say than the Naval officers, who are only auxiliaries, than Admiral and Mrs. Croft, who have quite subsidiary parts; less than the lesser characters of other novels—Anne Steele, Mrs. Palmer, Caroline Bingley, Charlotte Lucas, Mrs. Allan. (It is true that everything she says is in character, emphasising her "composed mind and polite manners", her discretion, her formality, her approval of rank. We have this impression of her reinforced by her actions—did she not "fresh arrange all her evening engagements in order to wait on" Lady Dalrymple?—and by the opinion of others, though this is scarcely laudatory when it comes from "Sir Walter and Miss". Says Elizabeth to Anne: "Oh! you may as well take back that tiresome book she would lend me, and pretend I have read it through . . . Lady Russell quite bores me with her new publications. You need not tell her so, but I thought her dress hideous the other night. I used to think she had some taste in dress, but I was ashamed of her at the concert. Something so formal and *arrangé* in her air; and she sits so upright! My best love, of course.")

(To which Sir Walter adds: "And mine . . . And you may say I mean to call upon her soon. Make a civil message. But I shall only leave my card. Morning visits are never fair by women at her time of life, who make themselves up so little. If she would only wear rouge, she would not be afraid of being seen; but last time I called I observed the blinds were let down immediately.")

(Now all this is still in character, but it does little to help us know Lady Russell any better, and certainly nothing to make us share Anne's love for her.) In fact, I suspect that as a personality she shares the same disadvantage as Mary Bennet—she is two-dimensional, seen only in the flat. (We get her characteristics rather than her character; and though in her case there is more variety—she is not like Mary the embodiment of a single idiosyncrasy—I do not find the multiple Lady Russell any more alive than simple Mary Bennet.)

(Of course it may be said that as she is so repeatedly described as formal, discreet, decorous, stiff and aristocratic, it is only natural that we should not find her easy to know—that were we to meet her in the flesh this would be so. But on the other hand we are supposed to see her through the eyes of Anne, who loved her and knew her intimately. We are not merely her social acquaintances. She should be as real to us as she was to Anne, and she obviously is not. We find it hard to understand her influence over her young friend, the part she has played in shaping her life and character; which is a loss to the book as a whole. I regard Lady Russell as Jane Austen's most important failure.)

(There is another character in *Persuasion* whom we find it difficult to know, and G. B. Stern at first suggested that she should be included in this chapter of imperfections. But when we came to talk over Mrs. Smith in detail we realised that the barrier which undoubtedly exists between her and the reader must also have existed between her and Anne and is a tribute to her creator's art rather than a slur upon it. In her case we really see what Anne Elliot saw. We see a woman courageous in misfortune, but owing her courage to a happy disposition rather than to any special strength or grace of mind. We see a woman kindly and friendly, able to get on well with her social inferiors—such as Nurse Rooke—cheerful and unsentimental, but also capable of deep and vindictive resentment, or why should she have kept William Elliot's extremely unpleasant letters for so long and through so many vicissitudes? But there is something more about her which we don't understand, which we don't like; somehow we don't quite trust her, and we are right, for she is fundamentally insincere. Not viciously so, but selfishly so. When she thought her friend Anne Elliot, who had been so good to her, was going to marry a man little better than a scoundrel, she gave her no word of warning, but rather of congratulation, being anxious above all for her good offices with him in her own interest. "It immediately occurred that something might be done in her favour by the influence of the woman he loved.")

(Anne herself took note of this: "After listening to this full description of Mr. Elliot, Anne could not but express some surprise at Mrs. Smith's having spoken of him so favourably in the beginning of their conversation. 'She had seemed to recommend and praise him.' 'My dear,' was Mrs. Smith's reply, 'there was nothing else to be done. I considered your marrying him as certain. . . . My heart bled for you, as I talked of happiness; and yet he is sensible, he is agreeable, and with such a woman as you it was not absolutely hopeless. He was very unkind to his first wife and they were wretched together. But

she was too ignorant and giddy for respect, and he had never loved her. I was willing to hope that you might fare better.' ”

This is all very well, but it will not quite do, and I have a strong feeling that Anne did not really like Mrs. Smith, in spite of her many qualities, but visited her only because she was an old friend who had fallen on evil days. Different as she is in a multitude of ways, Mrs. Smith belongs to the same category as Mary Crawford, a woman whom we cannot like in spite of many attractions—in this case mainly moral ones—just because we do not trust her. No, certainly Mrs. Smith is not a failure.)

Another failure I would deny, and this time in the teeth of my collaborator, is Lady Catherine de Bourgh. G. B. Stern includes her in her list of characters which are less than perfect because, she says, she is exaggerated and her rudeness is impossible. I agree that she is exaggerated, but if every character who is at all larger than life were to be regarded as a failure, we should have nothing but a gallery of failures from Dickens. Certainly she is conceived on the lines of caricature rather than of literal observation, but she obeys the rules of caricature in that her lines are only exaggerations of a faithful likeness.

Personally I do not think her rudeness is impossible. It belongs to a different category from Mr. Palmer's—largely because it is in keeping with the rest of her character. I have known great ladies to-day scarcely a whit less rude than she, and I am sure that whit would be made up were they in anything like the position of Lady Catherine. We must remember that she lived in a day when great ladies were given their heads—when there was no income-tax or super-tax or land tax to make life insecure for them in their country mansions, no “servant problem” to inhibit the flow of obsequious underlings, and only distant, foreign rumblings of that social order which is now the talk of their own drawing-rooms. The fact that one dislikes rudeness does not make it incredible except perhaps to oneself. Personally I do not dislike it as much as servility, and that brings me to the thought that if Lady Catherine is a failure so is Mr. Collins. For they are a pair. If she is much too large for life, so is he. I maintain that Mr. Collins is every bit as exaggerated as Lady Catherine.

But to me they are neither of them failures, unless it is really unpardonable to mix farce with comedy. Certainly they both belong to farce, whereas the rest of *Pride and Prejudice*, even including Mrs. Bennet, belongs to comedy. This may be technically an error. But all I can say is that it answers here. Imagine the novel without Lady Catherine or Mr. Collins, or with a Lady Catherine and Mr. Collins conceived on lines no more sweeping than Mrs. Norris or Dr. Grant. It would lose



a very important flavour—come closer to the insipidity it has acquired on the screen and on the stage. Personally I hold that Lady Catherine and Mr. Collins are magnificent, and they stand together. They are like a pair of Toby jugs on a shelf of Dresden china. They do not really “belong”, but they look fine. The general effect is much better than if they were not there, and only a fanatic would have them taken away.

Returning to other standards of comparison, they are neither of them conceived with that flatness which characterises the genuine failures. They are both three-dimensional—revealing their many contours in a fine flow of conversation. There is a great deal in Lady Catherine besides rudeness. There is pride, and there is the most ineffable condescension. There is also a most democratic interest in other people’s affairs, and a certain amount of what might almost be called kind-heartedness. Nor is Mr. Collins all servility—he can be stiff on occasion, he is conscientious, scrupulous, industrious—in his garden, not in his study—obviously a devoted husband, or rather, so firmly believing himself devoted to his wife that he may for all intents and purposes be said to be so. He and Lady Catherine are complementary pictures—they “feed” each other like two back-chat comedians. I would not part with either of them for anything.

## CHAPTER XII

### “ Sometimes One Conjectures ”

(a) G. B. STERN

IT might be said of many authors that their most attractive characters were those that never actually appeared, but were only mentioned by other characters to stimulate the reader's imagination. No characters created by ourselves out of stray hints and speculations could ever transcend those that Jane Austen has actually bequeathed us in free heritage ; yet it is also true that her characters are so alive that they not only live themselves, but have enough vitality left over to animate into life those whom they merely mention but who never appear on the scene. It is almost impossible to invent natural dialogue throughout a book without an escape of irrelevant personalities, sometimes several times, sometimes only once, just as in our own careless chatter of every day, certain names occur, and we reply, when asked : “ Oh, nobody you know,” or “ Nobody that matters.”

So let us, for the fun of it, gather up a few of these nobodies from the books of Jane Austen, bring them out of the background and see if, without undue forcing, they will yield for our delight what may have been their own ideas of the character who introduces them into conversation. (“ Sometimes one conjectures right, and sometimes one conjectures wrong. I wish I could conjecture how soon I shall make this rivet quite firm,” remarked Frank Churchill.)

We may as well start with Miss Andrews. Do you remember her ? She was the friend of Isabella Thorpe in *Northanger Abbey* (but we know that Isabella Thorpe was incapable of any real friendship)—“ a particular friend of mine, a Miss Andrews, a sweet girl, one of the sweetest creatures in the world ”. Follows a whole page of further information about Miss Andrews. Isabella is so enthusiastic, talking to her beloved Catherine Morland on the subject, we cannot but believe Miss Andrews, in spite of the statement that she is as beautiful as an angel, must really have been one of these nice plain girls, a born understudy : “ I am so vexed with the men for not admiring her ! I scold them all amazingly about it. . . . I told Captain Hunt at one of our assemblies this winter that if he was to tease me all night I would not dance with him unless he would allow Miss Andrews to be as beautiful as an angel.”

Animation, apparently, is "exactly what Miss Andrews wants ; for I must confess there is something amazingly insipid about her ". Yes, Miss Andrews begins to grow before us, even though for the present we hear no more than that "she is netting herself the sweetest cloak you can conceive ", and "she could not get through the first volume of Sir Charles Grandison ".

Only once again do we catch a glimpse of her, and that time she wore her puce-coloured sarsenet :

" . . . I remember too, Miss Andrews drank tea with us that evening . . . and she looked so heavenly that I thought your brother must certainly fall in love with her. I could not sleep a wink all night for thinking of it ! "

And that, I believe, is the end of Miss Andrews ; but if we remain very quiet, musing on that sweet girl, gradually, stealing out of the twilight, a portrait emerges which I think must be the conception which Jane Austen meant us to have, although she says nothing about it. It is not, however, the obvious idea of Miss Andrews which I set before you : understudy and echo to the brilliant, fashionable, good-looking Isabella, thankful for notice and perpetually endearing herself by her own failure to attract the male creature. There is no reason why this should *not* be Miss Andrews, but somehow I fancy her otherwise ; plain, certainly, or Isabella would not have repeated twice that she was beautiful as an angel, and then (complacently) that she scolded the men amazingly for not admiring her. I cannot help seizing an impression written between the lines of all this, that Miss Andrews saw through Isabella perfectly well, and found her own demure entertainment in the exuberant hypocrisies of that young woman.

Catherine Morland, once she had discovered Isabella to be what I must, for want of an expression more in keeping with the period, call bogus, would have no more to do with her ; Catherine was very young, honest and intolerant ; she did not perceive that Isabella's perpetual turns and twists of mind, for ever in pursuit of what would gratify her insatiable vanity, Isabella's exaggerations, protestations and so forth, were in the least amusing ; Miss Andrews, on the other hand, an earlier friend, sitting by quietly with her netting-box, neglected by the men who crowded around Isabella, hearing Isabella scold them for neglecting her and thus gain additional credit to herself for loyalty ; Miss Andrews, I venture to think, was prodigiously entertained by the spectacle, and presently would slip away to confide in a companion of her own sly intelligence how yet another poor foolish moth was getting his wings singed at the candle : " His name is Morland, my dear ; James Morland,

and he has but now arrived from Oxford to spend a few days of his Christmas vacation with that tiresome rattle John Thorpe. He was not even aware of my existence, so I was able to take note of what occurred ; and as he has even less of quickness than most of them, there is little hope that he can judge rationally of his friend's sister. We will see ; but mark my words, unless poor Mr. Morland has at least thirty thousand pounds to back his pretensions, he will be a sadder and wiser man by the end of the spring."

Of Charles Maddox in *Mansfield Park*, we hear even less than of Miss Andrews ; yet, conceived in the same key, I cannot help imagining him as a young man with a great deal of humorous perception of what is going on around him, though with the inestimable gift of keeping his thoughts to himself so that no one should suspect him of sarcasm. How do I get that idea ? I have not a notion ; it springs as full-fledged from my mind as Minerva from the forehead of Jupiter. Tom Bertram merely says, when they are in a quandary as to who should play Anhalt in the Mansfield Park theatricals :

" . . . I could name at this moment at least six young men within six miles of us who are wild to be admitted into our company, and there are one or two that would not disgrace us. I should not be afraid to trust either of the Olivers or Charles Maddox. Tom Oliver is a very clever fellow, and Charles Maddox is as gentlemanlike a man as you will see anywhere . . ."

Miss Crawford calmly replied :

" . . . Have I ever seen either of the gentlemen ? Yes, Mr. Charles Maddox dined at my sister's one day, did not he, Henry ? A quiet-looking young man. I remember him. Let *him* be applied to, if you please . . ."

And presently, to Fanny :

" . . . and I can tell Mr. Maddox that I shall shorten some of *his* speeches, and a great many of *my own*, before we rehearse together."

Edmund says later on : " I know no harm of Charles Maddox," and his name is not mentioned again except when the Miss Bertrams and Miss Crawford are exultant that Edmund has consented, after all, to play Anhalt in place of a stranger : they " seemed to think it as great an escape to be quit of the intrusion of Charles Maddox, as if they had been forced into admitting him against their inclination ".

Now Tom Bertram's recommendation was no recommendation at all ; he was incapable of niceness in his judgment ; you remember when his boon companion Mr. Yates was introduced to Sir Thomas, the author tells us " Mr. Yates's family and connections were sufficiently known to

him to render his introduction as the ‘particular friend’—another of the hundred particular friends—of his son exceedingly unwelcome.” Yet it is suggestive and slightly in favour of Charles Maddox that he was not a *particular* friend of Tom Bertram, and we hear no more of him than that he is “gentlemanlike” and “quiet-looking”. Another clue is provided for us, if we care to accept it, by the fact that Julia and Maria Bertram were exultant at *not* having Charles Maddox included in their private theatrical company. If Maddox had been anything like Henry Crawford, that is to say, had he been at all stimulating or romantic from the point of view of young ladies ever in search of excitement, they would not have so heartily welcomed the solution which eliminated him from the cast of “Lovers’ Vows” and substituted a mere brother. Therefore I gather Charles Maddox was not a wild young man, or, living in the neighbourhood, he would have been a closer friend of Tom Bertram’s; and not fascinating, or Miss Crawford would have remembered more about him than that he was quiet-looking, and the Miss Bertrams would have welcomed the prospect of a more intimate propinquity. I have, furthermore, an idea that he was clever, formed simply from the fact that Tom Bertram speaks of Tom Oliver as “a clever fellow”, and of Charles Maddox as merely “gentlemanlike”. Tom Oliver was probably a rattle; Charles Maddox kept his opinions to himself, not deeming it worth while to share them with such a one as Tom Bertram; and I should have been prepared to hear him at any dinner-party among the county families of the Mansfield Park neighbourhood, being pleasantly sarcastic and keenly observant about Lady Bertram, Tom Bertram and his handsome, fashionable sisters, Mrs. Norris, the Grants, the young Crawfords, and especially on the subject of Miss Maria Bertram’s engagement to Mr. Rushworth. He would have heard of the theatricals, for you remember Tom was “giving an invitation to every family who came in his way.” . . . And probably regretted aloud, gently, that he had not had the privilege of being present at rehearsals and watching how Mr. Rushworth endured the sight of his fair Maria so frequently in the ardent embrace of Mr. Crawford. . . . It may well be that Charles Maddox, although excluded from the intimate circle, was yet the first to prophesy what would be the end of that engagement; and when the catastrophe actually occurred, and Mrs. Rushworth eloped with Henry Crawford, amidst the buzz of gratified comment on the scandal, I seem to hear a chorus of voices remarking: “How *odd*, Mr. Maddox, you said that it would be thus!”

Three more figures I have chosen for the fun of speculating on their attitude towards those characters who mention them, and therefore to whom they owe their very being. “My aunt Hayter,” in *Persuasion*,

would, we can be sure, have had much to say about Mary Musgrove, second daughter of Sir Walter Elliot, who, by marrying Charles Musgrove, imagined that that gave her the right to look down upon his "low connections". And Mrs. Perry, wife of the apothecary who almost daily attended that amiable hypochondriac, Mr. Woodhouse—I can somehow hear Mrs. Perry discussing the Woodhouses with, perhaps, Mrs. Goddard, headmistress of the school where Harriet Smith was parlour pupil.

And finally, Colonel Forster must have had some very clear opinions about Miss Lydia Bennet, and expressed himself, we dare say, with considerable bluntness after the discovery that she had eloped with one of the less reputable officers of his regiment, Wickham, while she was the guest of himself and his wife at Brighton. An embarrassing predicament, but perhaps he deserved it a little, for like so many sensible men in Jane Austen's books, he did not display much of that sense in his choice of a wife, who, apparently, was almost as young, as crude, as lively and idiotic in her pleasures as Lydia herself.

"Dear me! we had such a good piece of fun the other day at Colonel Forster's! Kitty and me were to spend the day there, and Mrs. Forster promised to have a little dance in the evening (by-the-bye, Mrs. Forster and me are *such* friends!) . . . and then, what do you think we did? We dressed up Chamberlayne in woman's clothes, on purpose to pass for a lady. Only think what fun! Not a soul knew of it but Colonel and Mrs. Forster, and Kitty and me. . . . Lord! how I laughed! and so did Mrs. Forster. I thought I should have died."

A few pages further on, Mrs. Forster is summed up for us by the author in two or three lines:

Mrs. Forster, the wife of the Colonel of the regiment. . . . This invaluable friend was a very young woman, and very lately married. A resemblance in good-humour and good spirits had recommended her and Lydia to each other, and out of their *three* months' acquaintance they had been intimate *two*.

Yet, Mr. Bennet, when his daughter Elizabeth begs him to forbid Lydia this visit to Brighton, representing to him "all the improprieties of Lydia's general behaviour, the little advantage she could derive from the friendship of such a woman as Mrs. Forster," replied: "Colonel Forster is a sensible man, and will keep her out of any real mischief." A sensible man with a foolish, pretty young wife; we know that couple. Over and over again, he must have expressed his weariness of Lydia staying in the house; begged his wife to romp a little less, to be more prudent,

more circumspect. But what could he expect, surrounded by a camp, and all his officers such smart, high-spirited vastly agreeable young fellows? Poor Colonel Forster, he did his best; he had the unpleasant mission of informing Mr. Bennet that his daughter had eloped to Scotland while a guest under his roof; he had to follow this express letter by a visit—"enquiring on his way into Hertfordshire, at all the turnpikes and at the Inns in Barnet and Hatfield, whether they had seen a couple come through". He had to convey to the unhappy father and sisters of Lydia that there was very little hope that Wickham would marry her; and next, spare time to accompany Mr. Bennet to London to try and discover her whereabouts. Jane says to Elizabeth:

"Colonel Forster did own that he had often suspected some partiality, especially on Lydia's side, but nothing to give him any alarm. I am so grieved for him. His behaviour was attentive and kind to the utmost. He *was* coming to us, in order to assure us of his concern, before he had any idea of their not being gone to Scotland. When that apprehension first got abroad, it hastened his journey."

Yes, a kind man, courteous and patient, willing to take any pains, but a lamentably weak man. After he had gone through all that trouble, if he had had the courage to mention to his wife only once, and in the mildest manner: "You see, my dear, what it led to, your friendship with Miss Lydia Bennet?"—what would she have replied? I can hear her pettish accents: "La! Colonel Forster, would you have me shut myself up? I vow she did at least bring a little life into the house. Was it not for Pratt, Denny and Chamberlayne, I could die of weariness, whilst you go on prosing away."

I have noticed a curious tendency, while searching for further enlightenment on these characters in Jane Austen who, like (or unlike) actors in modern films, never put in a "personal appearance", to visualise them informed with shrewdness, good sense and a quiet ironic outlook. I cannot explain it, unless by assuming that Miss Austen, like most authors, found her chief enjoyment after creating hero and heroine, in pure comedy characters, so that these occupied the foreground, and the quiet and shrewd ones (as I imagine Miss Andrews and Charles Maddox, Mrs. Perry and my Aunt Hayter) fell out of the scene altogether.

(Mrs. Hayter was, you will recollect, Mrs. Musgrove's sister: "They had each had money, but their marriages had made a material difference in their degree of consequence." She does not figure often in the pages of *Persuasion*; it was her eldest son Charles, who, without any great pretensions to offer, was steadily in love with his cousin Henrietta, and afterwards married her; although Mary Musgrove, herself an Elliot

and the second daughter of a baronet, regarded him as "Nothing but a country curate. . . . Considering the alliances which the Musgroves have made, she has no right to throw herself away. I do not think any young woman has a right to make a choice that may be disagreeable and inconvenient to the *principal* part of her family, and be giving bad connexions to those who have not been used to them." Mary imagined herself more powerful than indeed she was ; she believed that by believing Henrietta was the girl preferred by Captain Wentworth, Charles Hayter's rival, that she could indeed make it so. We see her snobbery at its most pitiful on the occasion of a long walk taken by the Musgrove sisters, Charles and Mary, Anne Elliot and Captain Wentworth :

Winthrop, without beauty and without dignity, was stretched before them, an indifferent house, standing low, and hemmed in by barns and buildings of a farmyard.

Mary exclaimed, " Bless me ! here is Winthrop. I declare I had no idea ! Well now, I think we had better turn back ; I am excessively tired."

But then, after controversy—

. . . it was settled between Charles and his two sisters, that he and Henrietta should just run down for a few minutes, to see their aunt and cousins, while the rest of the party waited for them at the top of the hill . . . Mary took the opportunity of looking scornfully around her, and saying to Captain Wentworth—

" It is very unpleasant having such connexions ! But, I assure you, I have never been in the house above twice in my life."

And that is all about the Musgroves' Aunt Hayter. So you see I have little to justify my firm idea that she was a woman with a broad, tolerant sense of humour, who, far from being crushed by Mrs. Charles Musgrove's contempt, thought it very funny indeed, and wondered why " my poor sister Musgrove " put up with it. For thus I feel she designated her sister at the Great House, with richness and consequence far superior to her own.

According to her nephew Charles Musgrove, who was a nice fellow and fond of her, her husband's farm prospered, and it was apparently a pleasant home to visit : all of which speaks well for the mistress of the place. Her own eldest son Charles was an intelligent man : " having been found on the occasion by Mr. Musgrove with some large books before him, Mr. and Mrs. Musgrove were sure all could not be right and talked, with grave faces, of his studying himself to death ". He may easily have inherited his intelligence from his mother, as well as that tact which always forbade her to thrust herself in where she was not



wanted ; his sensitive withdrawal from the contest directly it seemed to him that Henrietta preferred Captain Wentworth indicated some profitable example and early training in the dignity of not staying on to become sulky or aggressive. For we never find Mrs. Hayter visiting either at Uppercross or at the cottage, though these were dwellings of her close relations. She must certainly have been born with more worldly cleverness than her sister Mrs. Musgrove, who suffered from the same complete lack of any mental attainments or concentration as, for instance, Lady Bertram, Mrs. Bennet and Mrs. Allen. She was, in short, a good-natured simpleton, as we pick up clearly :

“ . . . I never went beyond the Streights, and never was in the West Indies,” (said Mrs. Croft, wife of the Admiral). “ We do not call Bermuda or Bahama, you know, the West Indies.”

Mrs. Musgrove had not a word to say in dissent ; she could not accuse herself of having ever called them anything in the whole course of her life.

Education can do little for those born without natural intelligence, and natural intelligence can supply much, even where there have not been great opportunities for education ; we may be sure that if Mrs. Croft had chosen to leave the elegant drawing-rooms at Uppercross and to walk to Winthrop instead, she would have sat in the kitchen with the Musgroves' Aunt Hayter, and found much comfortable conversation, tinged with spice as an apple is streaked with russet ; humorous weather-beaten conversation which presently must veer towards Mary Musgrove, her affectations and intrigues and petty snobberies, of so little importance save in her own estimation ; and certainly not to two excellent women with a proper sense of values. We will, then, leave them together, rocking with laughter over their glasses of home-brewed wine, as Mrs. Hayter remembers and recounts yet another good-natured anecdote of “ the Elliot pride ”.)

There remains Mrs. Perry of my little company of shadows ; and from all asides mentioning Mrs. Perry, I likewise get an impression of sturdy good sense and shrewd appraisal of the society of Highbury. Let me try and put together my evidence. Of course I might have chosen Mr. Perry himself, instead of his wife, for he, too, is eligible for the chief rule which governs this chapter : that it should treat of characters who do not appear themselves, but only vicariously, leaving it to others to quote their words and opinions. But so often through the obliging medium of Mr. Woodhouse does Mr. Perry almost seem to enter upon the scene and talk, that my instinct disqualifies him, though my judgment would admit him. We had better make do with Mrs. Perry, and

through her, strengthen, or rather contradict our impressions of Mr. Perry ; for in spite of Mr. Woodhouse's high regard for his apothecary and doctor, I suspect that Mr. Perry in his own home was not nearly the grave and omnipotent personage which he seemed in the eyes of his hypochondriacal patron.

Mrs. Perry's probable opinion of Mr. Woodhouse did credit to her honesty ; for although he was a valuable asset professionally and financially, she could not forbear, I am sure, remarking to her husband often enough that he should not encourage that gentleman to coddle himself so much, nor have so many fads and fancies, nor think that a busy apothecary had nothing to do but attend to them at any hour of day or night, and in any extremes of weather— (True, I am making this up, and who is there to contradict me ?) Mr. Perry, not so mentally straightforward as his wife, did not quite care to face up to the fact that the amiable invalid of Hartfield was in a less precarious state of health than he and Mr. Woodhouse had agreed he should be. Mr. Perry talked vaguely of fatal effects of cold and indigestion upon old gentlemen with highly delicate constitutions . . . "Pcha !" exclaimed Mrs. Perry, "highly delicate fiddlesticks ! And I know for a fact that whenever he talks nonsense, he says 'As Perry says', and then they all think you a fool !" ("Mr. Woodhouse was rather agitated by such harsh reflections on his friend Perry, to whom he had, in fact, though unconsciously, been attributing many of his own feelings and expressions.") But Mr. Perry, sadly shaking his head, mounted his horse and rode off yet again through the whirling snow.

No, I am not inventing this, after all. One indirect clue I can offer, and here it is : Mrs. Perry was obviously not a favourite with Mr. Woodhouse, as was Mrs. Goddard or Mrs. Bates. Her omission from his little card-parties, from his little suppers, was conspicuous, and we cannot attribute it entirely to the social distinctions of that period : "Mr. Perry was an intelligent, gentlemanlike man, whose frequent visits were one of the comforts of Mr. Woodhouse's life." And "Unless he fancied himself at any time unequal to company, there was scarcely an evening in the week in which Emma could not make up a card-table for him." And though after the Westons and Mr. Knightley—the chosen and best—"came a second set, among the most come-atable"—(a curious word)—"of whom were Mrs. and Miss Bates, and Mrs. Goddard", we never see Mrs. Perry in Mr. Woodhouse's drawing-room. Now why was that ? She was friends with Mrs. and Miss Bates, with Mrs. Goddard, with the Coles ; excellent worthy people ; they give a dinner-party and tentatively invite Miss Woodhouse, who is graciously permitted by her father to accept the deferential invitation : "Perry tells me that Mr.

Cole never touches malt liquor.—Mr. Cole is very bilious. No, I would not be the means of giving them any pain.” So I must again repeat this significant point : Mrs. Perry cannot have been popular with Mr. Woodhouse ; therefore we must reason that Mrs. Perry did not take his complaints seriously enough.

Or am I altogether wrong, and is it for social reasons alone that we do not meet with Mrs. Perry in the higher circles of Highbury and Hartfield ? Was an apothecary’s wife reckoned indeed so much lower than a schoolmistress like Mrs. Goddard ? Old Mrs. Bates, we know, is wife of the ex-vicar, and as such, in spite of her fallen fortunes, entitled to be on terms of equality with Mr. Woodhouse ; but who and what were Mr. and Mrs. Cole (according to the standards of the period) that Mr. Woodhouse should so easily suggest their calling upon him ? “ I think it would be much better if they would come in one afternoon next summer, and take their tea with us ; take us in their afternoon walk, which they might do, as our hours are so reasonable.”

In *Cranford*, written only about thirty years later, Mr. Hoggins, mentioned by now as a surgeon, not an apothecary, who attends the ladies of Cranford, as Mr. Perry attended the ladies and gentlemen of Highbury, is certainly not allowed to be their equal until long after the astounding piece of news that Lady Glenmire is to marry him :

“ Mr. Hoggins is rich, and very pleasant-looking,” said Miss Matty, “ and very good-tempered and kind-hearted.”

“ She has married for an establishment, that’s it. I suppose she takes the surgery with it,” said Miss Pole, with a little dry laugh at her own joke. . . . A man whom Mrs. Jamieson had tabooed as vulgar, and inadmissible to Cranford society, not merely on account of his name, but because of his voice, his complexion, his boots, smelling of the stable, and himself, smelling of drugs.

Even arguing by this analogy and the horror of the Cranford ladies at Lady Glenmire lowering herself to such a misalliance, the Coles were in trade, much is said of their want of refinement and their low origins, and I must still believe an apothecary to rank as high, if not higher ; nevertheless, as I have already shown, the Woodhouses do consort with the Coles ; never with Mrs. Perry. Now which do we most seek to avoid in life : those who are unrefined, or those who (our instincts warn us) see through our most beloved illusions of ourselves ?

Mrs. Perry, I must always believe, saw through Mr. Woodhouse.

(b) SHEILA KAYE-SMITH

"We came post all the way, and had a very smart beau to attend us. Dr. Davies was coming to town and so we thought we'd join him in a post-chaise."

Thus Miss Nancy Steele, whose mind ran on "smart beaus", though we are told that she "was nearly thirty, with a plain and not a sensible face". She declares that "everybody laughs at me about the doctor, and I cannot think why. My cousins say they are sure I have made a conquest; but for my part, I declare I never think about him from one hour's end to another. 'Lord! here comes your beau, Nancy,' my cousin said t'other day, when she saw him crossing the street to the house. 'My beau, indeed!' said I; 'I cannot think who you mean, the doctor is no beau of mine.'"

Later on we hear that when Elinor and Marianne Dashwood went to spend the day at Lady Middleton's house in Conduit Street, where the Steeles were also staying, a very light effort on their part would have reconciled the elder to "the sacrifice of the best place by the fire after dinner, which their arrival occasioned. . . . Would they only have laughed at her about the doctor! But so little were they inclined to oblige her, that if Sir John dined from home she might spend a whole day without hearing any other raillery on the subject than what she was kind enough to bestow on herself."

I always think this rather ill-natured and superior of the Miss Dashwoods—of Elinor, rather, for Marianne was still too deeply sunk in her sorrow for Willoughby to be expected to notice anything outside herself. But Elinor was invariably stern with Nancy, and on yet another occasion we find her refusing to supply the badinage for which the poor soul craved. Thus when they met in Kensington Gardens and Miss Steele was wearing a new hat.

"There now, *you* are going to laugh at me too. But why should I not wear pink ribbons? I do not care if it *is* the doctor's favourite colour. I am sure, for my part, I should never have known he *did* like it better than any other colour if he had not happened to say so. My cousins have been so plaguing me!"

To which we are told "Elinor had nothing to say", though later in the same conversation she had a cutting retort to Nancy's repudiation of an imaginary suggestion from her cousins that she "should write to the doctor, to get Edward the curacy of his new living. . . . 'La!' I shall say directly, 'I wonder how you could think of such a thing.

*I write to the doctor, indeed ! ”* Miss Dashwood coldly replied : “ It is a comfort to be prepared for the worst. You have got your answer ready.”

POOR Nancy ! She was better served by Mrs. Jennings, who crowned her good nature in giving her five guineas to “ take her down to Exeter ” by suggesting that she was “ in hopes to fall in with the doctor again ”. And that is the last we hear of either Nancy or the doctor.

One thing I am convinced of—they did not marry. The elder Miss Steele was so equally unattractive in mind, person and fortune, that one would require conclusive evidence to believe in her marrying anybody. None is provided here, and indeed I am inclined to think that the romance existed only in her imagination. All that we know that the doctor did by way of encouraging her—and if there had been more we should certainly have heard of it—was to share a post-chaise with her and her sister on their journey to London and afterwards to call on them at Bartlett’s Buildings. No other token of love passed between them, unless it was the fact that on the journey he “ behaved very genteelly and paid ten or twelve shillings more than we did ”. But only a very little would encourage Nancy, and probably the doctor was not the last “ smart beau ” that she imagined in pursuit of her.

I do not think for a moment that he deliberately misled her—he would not have dared. I see the doctor as rather an ingenuous, kindly man, who had the clergyman’s faculty for making himself agreeable to ladies whom other men pass by. I have very little material for constructing his character, as he never appears in person ; but he was certainly good-natured, or he would not have paid more than the Miss Steeles for his third share of the carriage. He also acknowledged pink to be his favourite colour, and I have read somewhere that to prefer the colour pink is to show a certain childishness and simplicity of disposition. One can see a simple kind-hearted man being very guilelessly willing to escort two lady acquaintances up to town.

I gather that the doctor was pretty well off, not only because of his generosity, but because he evidently had more than one benefice. His “ new living ” must have been held in plurality or he would not have needed a curate for it, curates in those days being substitutes rather than assistants. His age is more doubtful. One pictures him as no longer young, probably, because the general raillery as well as her own particular wishes allot him to Nancy, whereas had he been young it is probable that the cousins in Bartlett’s Buildings, with Mrs. Jennings and Sir John following suit, would have regarded him as Lucy’s beau, she being so much the younger and prettier of the two sisters, and they knowing nothing then of her engagement to Edward Ferrars. On the

other hand, a middle-aged clergyman would probably have been already married—unless he was a widower, and we are given no suggestion of this. Still, there are many reasons for remaining a bachelor, of which Miss Steele was doubtless one. Though, as I have said before, I don't believe he was even aware that there was such a point at issue. This is the sort of letter I can imagine him writing to his friend Mr. Simpson in Exeter.

“MY DEAR SIR—Arrived safely in town after a tolerable journey, and am now settled at the Globe, where I shall remain until this day sen'night. I hope to have concluded by then all the business relating to Dewsbury and shall go there for a day or two immediately on my return. We were three in the carriage coming up, which was too many for comfort, but I could not very well deny the request of two ladies I met at Mrs. Cooke's that we should combine in the hire of a post-chaise ; especially as I was of the opinion that had I not agreed their slender resources would have obliged them to travel by the coach. Their name is the Miss Steeles, and they ask to be remembered to you, for I believe you have met them at the Sharpes. I found them very good-humoured, agreeable ladies, and the younger is excessively pretty. But I must declare myself relieved to be spared their company on the journey home, never having cared to occupy the third seat in a chaise, for which I now find myself too large. London is full and I have already met the Richardsons and hope to fall in with the Cartrights before my return. I attend to your business with Brock to-morrow. I hope that your gouty state improves and that Tom Rose will show himself more industrious now you are returned to overlook him. My compliments, pray, to Mrs. Simpson and Miss Eliza, and believe me always, dear Sir, your friend and well-wisher

GEORGE DAVIES.”

Another unseen character on whom I am tempted to conjecture is Mrs. Partridge—“the lady I have always resided with when in Bath”. We know how indignant Emma felt when Mrs. Elton insisted that “my particular friend Mrs. Partridge . . . would be the very person for you to go into public with”. Not only was it an outrage that Miss Woodhouse of Hartfield should be indebted to Mrs. Elton for “what was called an introduction”, but she had her own conjecture as to the character and situation of Mrs. Elton's friend—“probably some vulgar, dashing widow, who, with the help of a boarder, just made shift to live !”

This conjecture has a ring of that same snobbish heartlessness which characterises that much less amiable person Sir Walter Elliot when he refers to Lord St. Ives's father as “a country curate, without bread to

eat", and later on heaps scorn on his daughter's visit to "a widow, Mrs. Smith, lodging in Westgate Buildings! A poor widow, barely able to live, between thirty and forty—a mere Mrs. Smith—an every-day Mrs. Smith, of all people and all names in the world." It is also not without parallel in her own thoughtless insult to Miss Bates, of which she afterwards repented so deeply; though in this case the cruelty was not due to snobbishness but to a misplaced attempt at wit. It is a tribute to her author's genius that Emma's lapses in this direction leave us still loving her, whereas our dislike of Sir Walter is swollen by his into contempt. Emma's character is presented with such skill that her faults, which are never disguised, appear as remediable inconsistencies in a fine but still fluid nature—just as we should find her in real life, as Mr. Knightley found her. The characters of an average novelist are liable to be too consistent, allowing too little for the fact that most of us have failings which are in direct contrast to our most obvious virtues. Emma was generous, charitable, kindhearted and deeply affectionate, yet she was snobbishly exclusive and self-satisfied, and had within her that streak of unimaginative cruelty which belongs to youth.

She was also intelligent—but she always guessed wrong; and I am surmising that she guessed wrong about Mrs. Partridge. Certainly she had nothing to go upon but her own outraged feelings, for Mrs. Elton's claim to be on terms of particular friendship with anyone could have been seen even on this second meeting as worth very little. Was she not already assuming a proprietary intimacy with "Knightley"? ✓

I can conjecture Mrs. Partridge writing this letter a few weeks earlier to her sister in London.

"I know my dearest Emily will rejoice when she hears my news, which is no less than that I am at last to be rid of Augusta Hawkins. After three winters of penance I think I *deserve* this relief! And it has all come about in the most amiable manner, too, without involving me in a quarrel with either Mrs. Suckling or Mrs. Bragge. I should be sorry to have had this happen, for I depend on them both for future recommendations, and you know I have also a deep regard for Mrs. Bragge, who is a very different sort of woman from the company she keeps. But for her I think I should have done with Miss at least two years ago. The money she paid was a help in securing for Mr. Partridge those small comforts so necessary to his enfeebled state, but there are other young women in Bath in need of a *chaperone*, and it would not be disagreeable to me to go into public with someone more well-bred. In view of our situation and being forced to live so much below our former style I have to be particularly

careful, and were it not for the special entreaty of Mrs. Bragge, to whom I can deny nothing, I should not have undertaken the charge of anyone so ungenteel. For though her sister is well-married, her father was nobody and her uncle with whom she has made her home during the last five years is but an attorney's clerk and lives in a very inferior part of Bristol. Nor does her *breeding* in any way atone for her *birth*. There is about her an air of vulgar freedom which is most repulsive, and I could see that such families as the Popes and Lauristons were greatly astonished at my having her acquaintance. But now all that is at an end, for believe me she is to be married ! I had begun to fear that no one in the sort of company I keep would take her even with ten thousand pounds ; for though she is not ill-looking there is an ostentation in her behaviour which robs her of all attraction for people of taste. She is all for finery and display and sometimes her hair is dressed in such a fashion as to cause more smiles of amusement than of admiration. You know how I value real elegance ! But she is to be married, and to a clergyman. You may be surprised at that but I assure you that the clergy to-day are very different from what they were when Mr. Partridge took orders. Then to be a *clergyman* was to be a *gentleman*. But now the sons of tradesmen are sent to the Universities and I understand that Mr. Elton's father made his money by some form of trading in Liverpool. He is a good-humoured, agreeable young man, but with an affected, studied manner that goes ill with his height and size. No doubt it is the lack of true *gentility* which makes him over *gentle*. But I should not have wished anything better for Augusta Hawkins and even now I wonder how she will commend herself in a small country parish, which I understand Highbury to be. She will probably find it very *quiet* and *retired* after Bath and Bristol, and I doubt if she has any resources with which to fill her time. You know what I think of her music and she has no love of her needle. However it is all for the best and I am delighted to think that next winter I may have a very different sort of boarder. I think now that I should prefer a quiet, elderly person to a young lady, for at my age I begin to feel the strain of going frequently into public and would sooner give nursing care at home. Having Mr. Partridge an invalid makes it not so difficult to care for a second person in the same way. Certainly I hope that another year will not pass without my having you, my dearest sister, as a valued guest. How much then we shall have to tell each other and how comfortable it will be. Now I hear nothing but talk of wedding-clothes and carriages. The bridegroom calls frequently and I marvel that he can be spared so long away from his parish. But I must not be ungrateful.



Pray give my compliments and greetings to Mr. Crofton and my love to little Clara if she is still with you. Tell her Mamma that I trust to have a glimpse of them both e'er long. Believe me—

Your affectionate sister

LUCY PARTRIDGE.

I forgot to state that she met him at the Master of the Ceremonies' ball."

Yet another letter I should like to write and that is from one of the Miss Owens, sisters of Edmund Bertram's "friend near Peterborough in the same situation as himself", with whom he went to stay when they were both "to receive ordination in the course of Christmas week". Edmund went with mixed feelings, knowing that Mary Crawford disapproved of the step he was taking and fearing that it might definitely decide her against him as a husband. We know that at that time he almost gave up all idea of her and deliberately prolonged his visit till a date when he thought—mistakenly, as it happens—that she would have left Mansfield. She on her side was wavering—affronted that he should thus resist her influence and do what he knew she objected to, but at the same time inclined to be anxious about his return and to wonder what was keeping him so long from home. She feared that some impatient, resentful words she had spoken before he went away might have had more effect than she intended. "She had, moreover, to contend with one disagreeable emotion entirely new to her—jealousy. His friend Mr. Owen had sisters : he might find them attractive."

So she calls on Fanny and tries to find out what *she* thinks about Edmund's absence and the Miss Owens.

"How many Miss Owens are there?"

"Three grown up."

"Are they musical?"

"I do not at all know. I never heard."

"That is the first question you know", said Miss Crawford, trying to appear gay and unconcerned, "which every woman who plays herself is sure to ask another. But it is very foolish to ask questions about any young ladies—about any three sisters just grown up ; for one knows, without being told, exactly what they are, all very accomplished and pleasing, and *one* very pretty . . . two play on the pianoforte, and one on the harp, and all sing, or would sing if they were taught, or sing all the better without being taught, or something like it."

Later on she asks :

"Suppose you were to have one of the Miss Owens settled at

Thornton Lacey, how should you like it? . . . I daresay they are trying for it. . . . Sir Thomas Bertram's son is somebody; and now he is in their own line. Their father is a clergyman, and their brother is a clergyman, and they are all clergymen together."

So Mary conjectures, but the only first-hand information we have as to the Miss Owens is Edmund's statement that they were "pleasant, good-humoured, unaffected girls", with the rider that "good-humoured, unaffected girls will not do for a man who has been used to sensible women". Were the Miss Owens, then, not sensible? I have made my own conjectures, and here is a letter from Miss Maria Owen to her former school friend, Miss Bridget White.

MY DEAR BIDDY,

How sorry we all wear that you could not spend the Christmas with us. We had such fun. George was at home and Billy and on the 26th we all went dancing at the Hall, where I had for the first two dances a most *unexpected* partner Herbert Cousins who as you know was with the Carburys at Portham last Easter. I never thought to see him again but I will tell you more when I see you for I cannot now. We laughed like annything. We have to a freind of George's staying with us to be ordained at Oxford. His name is Edmund Bertram and his father is a baronette which makes him very proud. He would not play charades with us on the evening he arrived but went into the studdy with Papa. Eleanor says she is sure he has been crost in love because he never laughs, but I think it is only pride and because he is not used to the idea of being a clergyman. Jane says he is prodigious handsome but I do not think so nor does Amelia. It is not much fun having him hear and I wish he would go, but when Mamma asked him to stay longer he seemed pleased. I wish she had not. Amelia said she would make him laugh once before he went away, so she fixed a pail of water over the door of his bedchamber while he was at Oxford with the Bishop. It spilled all over him when he came back and we laughed like annything, for we were all hiding behind the school-room door. But he did not laugh, and Papa and Mamma were monstrous angry with us, even more with Jane and Eleanor and me than with Amelia because we are young ladies and she is still in the schoolroom. Mamma says I must try to learn some *ackomplishments*, so I have started to draw and took a very good likeness of Mr. Bertram in his surpliss reading the service on Sunday, which he did so slow I thought we would never be home again. George says it is a new idear to read as if you were acting and Edmund must be careful if he does not want to be taken for a Meth-

dist. Papa says it is ranting and I cannot think why Mr. Bertram should do it because he disapproves of acting. He said so when I asked him. Mamma says I am impudent. I wish you had been there with me to quiz him with me for he needs to be taken down, but my sisters can only think of booby traps. Write to me soon and tell me your news. Who are your partners this winter and have you met any new men? Eleanor asks how is Augustus.

Yours very sincerely,

MARIA OWEN.

## CHAPTER XIII

### “ *A Bend or Two, but Nothing of Consequence* ”

#### (1) JANE AUSTEN QUIZ

1. What kind of apricot did Dr. Grant discuss with Mrs. Norris, and what was the price of it ?
2. (a) What were the Christian names of—  
Lady Middleton, Mr. Woodhouse, Mrs. Clay, Mr. Morland, Mrs. Weston, Miss Bates, Bingley, Mr. Collins, Mr. Elton, Mr. Smith, Willoughby ?  
(b) Which leading characters have no Christian names given them ?  
(c) What were the maiden names of—  
Mrs. Smith, Lady Bertram, Mrs. Elton, Lady Middleton, Lady Catherine de Bourgh ?  
(d) Mention two or more characters called—  
Anne, Jane, Charles, Maria, Elizabeth, Anna, William, Henry—and what did Admiral Croft say all young ladies should be called to avoid confusion ?  
(e) Give the name of the shop where the Campden Place ladies sheltered from the rain—where Harriet and Frank Churchill are separately described shopping—where Elinor and Marianne Dashwood met their half-brother.
3. Give three occasions on which Fanny Price unwittingly scores over her aunt Norris.
4. What do we know about—  
(a) Miss Grantley, (b) Mrs. Speed, (c) Miss Pope, (d) Charlotte Davis, (e) Miss King, (f) Biddy Henshawe, (g) Lady Stornoway, (h) the Lady Frasers, (i) the Tupmans, (j) Lady Mary Grierson ?
5. Give context of quotation headings to Chapters 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13.
6. By whom and in what capacity were the following servants employed :  
(a) Baddeley, (b) James, (c) Hill, (d) Nicols, (e) Dorothy, (f) Thomas, (g) Wright, (h) Rebecca, (i) Dawson, (j) Serle, (k) Mrs. Hodges, (l) Mrs. Chapman, (m) Patty, (n) Christopher Jackson, (o) Jemima, (p) Harry, (q) Robert ?

7. What, according to Charles Musgrove, were Charles Hayter's prospects?

8. By whom and by what methods of transport were the following journeys undertaken?

(a) From Bath to Clifton, (b) from Highbury to Boxhill, (c) from Uppercross to Lyme, (d) from Bath to Northanger, (e) from Northanger to Fullerton, (f) from Barton to Portland Street, London, (g) from Mansfield Park to Sotherton, (h) from Exeter to Bartlett's Buildings, Holborn, (i) from Longbourn to Netherfield (three trips within a week), (j) from Mansfield Park to Mansfield Common.

9. In which of Jane Austen's novels are the following cited and by whom?—

(a) Cowper's "Oh, ye Avenues, etc.", (b) "the inimitable Miss Larolles", (c) "the Lady of Branhholm Hall", (d) a book about "nothing but an old man on a see-saw", (e) "M<sup>de</sup> de Genlis and her Adelaide".

10. Of whom, by whom and to whom was the following said?—

(a) "Last time I saw her she had a red nose", (b) "I fancy he is very unlike his brother—silly, and a great coxcomb", (c) "she is the sort of elegant creature one cannot keep one's eyes from, and I do pity her from my heart", (d) "It seems to me to show an abominable sort of conceited independence, and a most country-town indifference to decorum", (e) "No one can call such an undersized man handsome. He is not five foot nine", (f) "the fairness of your friend was an open attraction; her firmness, you know, could only be understood by yourself".

11. Where and in what connection does Jane Austen particularly introduce—horses, dogs, poultry?

12. In *Emma* there are two characters only, besides Emma herself, who were present at the three dinner-parties, at Randalls, at Hartfield, and at Mr. Cole's. (1) Who were they? (2) Who (four) attended two? (3) Who (six) one only?

The answers to this Quiz are on p. 182. They contain one deliberate mistake.

#### (2) ODDS AND ENDS

Why did Mr. Knightley not go to Miss Taylor's wedding? It seems odd that he should not have been present at the marriage of such an old friend, marrying a man, moreover, who was another friend of his. We are given no hint that his absence was on essential business, and he came back on the evening of the day itself. He came from

London, only sixteen miles away, so could surely have hastened his return and been in time for the ceremony. It is a point which is not even raised in the novel, but I think it needs explaining. The same applies in a less degree to Mrs. Elton's absence from the Woodhouse-Knightley wedding, for the particulars of which she had to rely on her husband.

S. K.-S.

Captain Benwick, in *Persuasion*, could be described in a play as a "small character part". I find him, however, excessively interesting, for Miss Austen has conceived him in her most subtle spirit of irony; amused irony—faintly contemptuous: "He showed himself so intimately acquainted with all the tenderest songs of one poet, and all the impassioned descriptions of hopeless agony of the other; he repeated with such tremulous feeling the various lines which imaged a broken heart, or a mind destroyed by wretchedness, and looked so entirely as if he meant to be understood, that she ventured to hope . . ." etc.

We all know that man. Modern psychology would call him an exhibitionist. Miss Austen builds him, before he appears, with a reputation for shyness, for reserve, for being inarticulate with strangers, so sensitive that no one must allude to his deep loss of Fanny Harville, whom he was to marry; then in one brief sentence (the italics are mine) she exposes him for ever. And allows Anne Elliot to understand him as well as she understands him herself: ". . . Captain Benwick was not inconsolable. That was a point which Anne had not been able to avoid suspecting before. . . . He had an affectionate heart. He must love somebody."

G. B. S.

No two authors, you might think, would be less likely to have their work mistaken for each other's than Jane Austen and Aldous Huxley. Nevertheless I have recently seen a quotation from the author of *Pride and Prejudice* attributed to the author of *Eyeless in Gaza*. It was in a review of the screen version of *Pride and Prejudice*, for the script of which Hollywood, with its fine sense of fitness, had made Mr. Huxley responsible. The critic, having congratulated him on the complete suppression of his literary personality in this task, goes on to say that one piece of dialogue, however, stands out unmistakably as his own. He then quotes Sir William Lucas's commendation of dancing as "one of the first refinements of polished society", with Darcy's reply: "Certainly, sir; and it has the advantage also of being in vogue amongst the less polished societies of the world—every savage can dance."

S. K.-S.

Here is a little mystery. Mrs. Elton's housekeeper's name was Wright, and her sphere was the kitchen (if she was not, indeed, the cook). "I should be extremely displeased if Wright were to send us up such

a dinner<sup>as</sup> could make me regret having asked *more* than Jane Fairfax to partake of it." We are also told that Wright held Mr. Knightley's Mrs. Hodges very cheap indeed. "She promised Wright a receipt, and never sent it." Yet at the ball at the Crown, Mrs. Elton asks Jane Fairfax—"How has Wright done my hair?" Surely her hair would have been done by her own maid, or if she had no maid (and I'm sure she had one) by a housemaid—not by the cook. Has Jane Austen made a little slip here? S. K.-S.

Certain phrases and words and idiom of that period have a flavour peculiar to Jane Austen. I have amused myself by collecting some at random. And we may well begin with: "I collect" which frequently stands for "I gather" of to-day; the same image, you see, of *assembling*, but one word has been dropped for the other, except where it partially survives as "I recollect".

"A fine morning so often turned off"—how would we phrase that now? Certainly nothing better occurs to me. "She had to struggle against a great tendency to lowness"—that would be depression or "the blues". "I did not above half like coming away"—we would now leave out "above" from that expression, and even so it is a bit out of date for 1943. "If this open weather holds much longer"—from the subsequent remarks of Marianne, I collect that "open weather" meant "mild weather".

"Some of those little attentions . . . which ladies can so easily give, will fix him"—This is Mr. John Dashwood advising Elinor about Colonel Brandon, but it recurs again and again. "The glory of fixing one who had been shot at by so many!" said Mary Crawford.

"Her mind might be always supported".—As unnecessary to comment on this phrase of Jane's as on "fix". Their exact and vivid metaphor explain themselves. The more steadfast high-principled characters in Jane Austen always have their minds supported in moments of stress. "Tolerable" and "rational" are two more words with the characteristic Jane flavour; nowadays we talk often and semi-profoundly about "rationalizing" as a psychological movement of the subconscious, but we do not extol a rational man or woman as highly as she does; to Jane Austen it is of the first importance that a human being should be "rational". I think when we say carelessly "So-and-so isn't even civilized", not meaning it literally, it works out at much the same thing.

"Respectable" has degenerated since Jane Austen's time. It is now applied scornfully to the sanctimonious, the smug and the timid bourgeoisie. But when Jane Austen says "respectable" she means "deserving respect", and I can find only one place where she too adds

a flavour of mockery, and that relates to Mr. Collins : " Gardening was one of his most respectable pleasures."

" Coxcomb "; " putrid "; " he is made " (Henry Crawford telling Fanny that William is promoted. Admiral Croft uses it too. I think it must be entirely a naval term to say anyone is made, as it occurs in Jane Austen's own letters about her naval brothers. Now we can say : it will be the making of him, with a more universal application.) One more example and I have done. Lady Bertram writes about her son : " Poor Tom, I am quite grieved for him " where I think she (and others who use it) must certainly mean " terribly grieved ". " Quite " in the modern sense has degenerated into a tepid word ; it modifies, as for instance : " Was the play good ? " " Quite good." Only when we say " quite right " does quite still retain its Jane Austen full significance of " absolutely ".

G. B. S.

The opening phrases of the novels are all more snappy and arresting than the closing ones—with the exception of *Northanger Abbey*. I have drawn up a table for comparison.

#### OPENING

#### CLOSING

##### *Sense and Sensibility*

The family of Dashwood had long been settled in Sussex. Their estate was large, etc.

And among the merits and the happiness of Elinor and Marianne, let it not be ranked as the least considerable that, though sisters, and living almost within sight of each other, they could live without disagreement between themselves, or producing coolness between their husbands.

##### *Mansfield Park*

About thirty years ago, Miss Maria Ward, of Huntingdon, with only seven thousand pounds, had the good luck to captivate Sir Thomas Bertram of Mansfield Park, in the County of Northampton.

On that event they removed to Mansfield ; and the parsonage there, which under each of its two former owners, Fanny had never been able to approach but with some painful sensation of restraint or alarm, soon grew as dear to her heart, and as thoroughly perfect in her eyes, as everything else within the view and patronage of Mansfield Park had long been.



### *Pride and Prejudice*

It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.

They were both ever sensible of the warmest gratitude towards the persons who, by bringing her into Derbyshire, had been the means of uniting them.

### *Northanger Abbey*

No one who had ever seen Catherine Morland in her infancy would have supposed her born to be a heroine.

I leave it to be settled by whomsoever it may concern, whether the tendency of this work be altogether to recommend parental tyranny or reward filial disobedience.

### *Emma*

Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her.

But in spite of these deficiencies, the wishes, the hopes, the confidence, the predictions of the small band of true friends who witnessed the ceremony were fully answered in the perfect happiness of the union.

### *Persuasion*

Sir Walter Elliot of Kellynch Hall, in Somersetshire, was a man who, for his own amusement, never took up any book but the *Baronetage*.

She gloried in being a sailor's wife, but she must pay the tax of quick alarm for belonging to that profession which is, if possible, more distinguished in its domestic virtues than in its national importance.

Perhaps these quotations may seem too brief to carry comparison, but they are typical of their contexts, and also, I think, long enough to show how inspired is the engagement, how comparatively uninspired the disengagement. At the beginning of the story we are taken straight into action, which of course is an essential manoeuvre to secure interest, whereas at the end the reader as well as the novel is disposed of. Jane Austen had the further disadvantage of the fashionable ending of her period, which was not only happy but tidy. Not a single thread must be left hanging, and every character must be provided for. The modern novel, which can end with a question, or even in the middle of a sen-

tence, affords much more scope. Jane Austen's endings often give the impression of being tacked on to the scene that actually concludes the story. *Persuasion*, for instance, finishes properly with the conversation between Anne and Captain Wentworth in Campden Place, at the end of which he exclaims: "Like other great men under reverses, I must endeavour to subdue my mind to my fortune. I must learn to brook being happier than I deserve." The chapter that follows is in the nature of an appendix. S. K.-S.

Even though I am not perpetually avid for signs of autobiography in fiction (knowing how, contrary to popular belief, authors usually mix the former with the latter in the same proportion as Falstaff's bread with his sack) yet I cannot help hearing in the dialogue between Captain Wentworth and Admiral Croft, the very voice of Jane's sailor brothers: the opinions, freely aired in front of their elders and betters, of the rebellious Younger Generation of her day: "Phoo! phoo!" cried the Admiral, "what stuff these young fellows talk", and so on. And then his elder sister: "I hate to hear you talking . . . as if women were all fine ladies, instead of rational creatures. We none of us expect to be in smooth water all our days." "Ah, my dear," said the Admiral, "when he has got a wife he will sing a different tune."

And how curious to reflect that war, in Jane Austen's period, was quite openly discussed as a way to fortune, not, as a century later, mainly for armament-makers, but a get-rich-quick for the naval profession:

"Ah, those were pleasant days when I had the *Laconia*! How fast I made money in her! . . . Poor Harville, sister. You know how much he wanted money: worse than myself."

"This peace will be turning all our rich naval officers ashore. Many a noble fortune has been made during the war. If a rich admiral were to come in our way, Sir Walter—" "He must now, by successive captures, have made a handsome fortune. She had only navy lists and newspapers for her authority, but she could not doubt his being rich." ". . . Was very sure that he had not made less than twenty thousand pounds by the war. . . . Besides which, there would be the chance of what might be done in any future war."

"Fortune came, his prize-money as lieutenant being great."

Those were the days for our Senior Service. And how often must Jane have sat eagerly listening, drinking it in, while the ardent young voices of her brothers on leave discussed their chances and hoped for a French frigate. G. B. S.

Richard has always seemed to me a romantic name, perhaps from childish association with Richard Cœur-de-Lion. But in Jane Austen,

it rather perplexingly appears, on the contrary, in association with all that is humdrum and unheroic. In the very first paragraph of *Northanger Abbey* (that gay satire meant to prick the highly coloured bubble of the gloomy pseudo-romantic style) we read : " Her father was a clergyman, without being neglected or poor, and a very respectable man, *though his name was Richard* and he had never been handsome."

Is there here some lost reference ? Might there have been a topical song about some " poor Richard " which put it out of favour, negligible beside the Johns, Williams, Henrys and Fredericks which to most of us are in a plainer category ? S. K.-S. discovered a provocative note in her edition of Jane Austen, pointing out that the publisher who had kept the first version of *Northanger Abbey* for eight years was called Richard Crosby. One of Jane Austen's brothers eventually retrieved the manuscript from him and " found the purchaser (i.e. Crosby) very willing to receive his money and to resign all claim to the copyright. He was still without suspicion that the MS. in his hands was by the author of *Pride and Prejudice*." It is an amusing suggestion that Jane Austen was human enough to enliven the very first page of her revised version of *Northanger Abbey* with a line that mocks this wicked and negligent publisher.

G. B. S.

I am always moved by the relations between Emma and Mrs. Weston, which give an almost perfect impression of friendship between two women—devoid equally of hectic absorption and veiled enmity. When Emma arrives for dinner at Randalls, we are told that she showed herself " just as happy as she was . . . there was not a creature in the world to whom she spoke with such unreserve as to [Mrs. Weston]—not any one to whom she related with such conviction of being listened to and understood, and being always interesting and always intelligible, the little affairs, arrangements, perplexities and pleasures of her father and herself . . . *half an hour's uninterrupted communication of all those little matters on which the daily happiness of private life depends was one of the first gratifications of each* ". The italics are mine, to emphasise that we have here the very essence of true friendship, which concerns itself neither with the riddle of the universe nor with personal intimacies, but with just those " little matters on which the daily happiness of private life depends ". A few lines further on we read " the very sight of Mrs. Weston, her smile, her touch, her voice, was grateful to Emma "—adding to the community of small interests that personal liking which is as much a part of friendship as of love. There was, of course, a substantial difference in their ages, and their former relation of governess and pupil must have coloured their attitude to some extent. But the friendship still remains, in my opinion, an ideal for women of any age or situation.

S. K.-S.

George Moore remarks in his *Conversations in Ebury Street* that Marianne's passion for Willoughby is the most burning thing in the English language. Here I agree with him. But he goes on to say that Keats's poetry is like a pussy-cat sunning itself on the lawn.

How lovely is whole-hearted agreement, but then how mysterious our swift, sudden, furious rebound. And how tragic, how capricious that such instant affinity should not also mean a promise, a secure avowal that it is to be thus all along the future, and that we can serenely trust ourselves to the delicious luck of this mental encounter. G. B. S.

"Taste": this word is used constantly in connection with musical performance. "Mr. Cole," says Harriet to Emma after the party, "said how much taste you had; and Mr. Frank Churchill talked a great deal about your taste, and that he valued taste much more than execution." Lady Catherine de Bourgh says of herself, "there are few people in England, I suppose, who have more true enjoyment of music than myself, or a better natural taste. If I had ever learned, I should have been a great proficient." We are told of Mary Bennet that she "had neither genius nor taste". The word obviously refers to the more emotional side of music: feeling, expression, "touch", appreciation—one or all of these. Like many other words it has narrowed its meaning, and stands now for a selective attitude—"I have no taste for, etc." or requires an adjectival "good" before it. S. K.-S.

I was lying awake and worrying over my personal life and affairs, when a semi-conscious longing arose to worry my mind instead, over something which need not worry me at all. Which sent me pondering on the life of Emma and Mr. Knightley when they were married and lived, according to plan, with Mr. Woodhouse at Hartfield. How did it work out, especially for Mr. Knightley? (I wish he may not sink into "poor Knightley" at once.) How much did he linger at Donwell regretting that he could not live there with his young wife, master in his own home like other men? How soon came the first row, when Knightley forgot the respect due to his father-in-law? And on whose side was Emma then? Did Mr. Woodhouse continue to insist on "wholesome" meals and "reasonable" hours? Was it gruel, gruel everywhere and not a drop to drink? Did he fuss in and out of season over possible damp airs in the warm evenings when husband and wife lingered where the sitting-room fire could not oppress them?—"but it is never safe to sit out of doors, my dear."

No careless joy for them without loving reproaches and timid warnings of disaster. And who sat with Mr. Woodhouse and soothed his fears, while his beloved daughter was bearing her first child (that

knock-out for little Henry as Donwell's heir)? Was that, too, to be demanded of Mr. Knightley in the name of duty?

✓ Oh, Miss Austen, it was *not* a good solution; it was a bad solution, an unhappy ending could we see beyond the last pages of the book. There was no solution here for the most ingenious novelist except a gentle painless death-in-his-sleep for dear old Mr. Woodhouse.

. . . So there I lay, and worried over them.

G. B. S.

Jane Austen's Chamber of Horrors—Mrs. Elton, John Thorpe, Mrs. Norris, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, Mr. Collins. Any other candidates? G. B. Stern offers Mr. Price and Sir Walter Elliot.

S. K.-S.

Current slang—"I am monstrous glad of it", "I scold them all amazingly about it", "I hear he is prodigious handsome", "That is an amazing horrid book, is it not?" "He cannot bear writing . . . he says it is quite shocking." Such "abuses of language"—equivalent to the "ripping", "killing" and "stunning" of the last century and to the "devastating", "dim" and "wizard" of this—are found only on the lips of Jane Austen's more vulgar characters—Anne Steele, Mrs. Jennings, Mrs. Palmer, Isabella Thorpe. Her heroes and heroines, with the exception of the immature Catherine Morland, speak unabused English.

S. K.-S.

✓ Jane Austen's last chapters are like deltas. The single river splits into many streams that trickle themselves away over a wide spread of flat marshy land. ✓ I can well believe she had no pleasure, no exhilaration in writing those six last chapters.

G. B. S.

Could I continue beyond all reasonable measure in writing my share of the chapter *Sometimes One Conjectures*, I should like to speculate on how Mrs. Martin and Miss Elizabeth Martin canvassed the recent damaging friendship of Miss Woodhouse of Hartfield for their hitherto unpretentious little visitor, Harriet Smith. "She is utterly spoilt" must have been the sorrowful verdict, together with some strong criticism about Emma's manners which would have considerably surprised that young lady's self-confidence.

I should also like to overhear Mr. and Mrs. John Knightley's two dear little boys in private session on Grandpa's eternal fussing and not allowing them a penknife and being afraid when their "rough" uncle tossed them to the ceiling. And Admiral Crawford's expressed opinion of his pert niece would have been soothing to those who cannot abide Mary Crawford. And Mrs. Bates and Mrs. Goddard—we collect that they were not pleased when the fricassee of sweetbreads and asparagus was removed without their being suffered to touch it; but it would

be refreshing to know their exact words. Nor shall we ever, except by rich surmise, know what Lady Dalrymple really thought of Sir Walter Elliot's toadying and anxious desires to be acknowledged as her relation. Nor whether Mrs. Ford was as patient and obliging as she outwardly seemed, while Miss Bates no doubt held up a stream of customers as she chattered and chose a pair of gloves that were "a little too large about the wrist" ?

G. B. S.

I wish to join issue with Mr. Leonard Woolf on two or three unfair indictments against Jane Austen. For he refuses to take into account that the opinions of the character are not necessarily the opinions of the author. And especially with Jane Austen, whose genius lies in character-drawing. Her most odious people not only speak but *think* like themselves, never like their creator. He remarks in his essay : ". . . it is clear that Jane herself, as well as the Netherfield ladies, 'had difficulty in believing that a man who lived by trade, and within view of his own warehouses, could have been so well-bred and agreeable' as Mr. Gardiner." But it is *not* clear. Why should he identify Miss Austen's own reactions with those of Miss Bingley and Mrs. Hurst in such an arbitrary fashion ? If anything be clear, it is that her sympathies are more warmly identified with Elizabeth Bennet and her Aunt and Uncle Gardiner whom she loves, than with the outrageous pride and snobbery of Darcy, the Netherfield ladies and Lady Catherine de Bourgh. The entire theme of the book is to show pride bent and snobbery defeated. My collaborator speaks of *Pride and Prejudice* as a Cinderella story . . . and who can suppose that Perrault's point of view was identified with that of the Baroness and the Ugly Sisters, rather than with the heroine ?

And again along the same lines : "She can tell Harriet that she (Emma) could not have visited her (Harriet) if she had married the yeoman Robert Martin—'You would have thrown yourself out of all good society'. And the reason she gives illuminates the class-consciousness of Jane Austen's environment." Not in the least. Mr. Woolf, I repeat, makes no allowances for a brilliant author's capacity to speak in character. The reason she gives, all the reasons she gives, serve to bring out the theme of the book, which is that Emma, however lovable, is terribly young, a terrible snob, talks nonsense, does infinite mischief by ignorance and interference, and must learn to realise it at last, repent and accept wisdom thankfully from a lover and husband who has no class-consciousness whatsoever. To accept Emma's harangues as Jane's own ideas, or even as representative of the period, is to destroy the moral and irony of the book and indeed its whole structure and *raison d'être*.

"Lucy's guilt is, of course, double, for she is not only poor but

lower class. . . . For the only social standard in the novels which competes with money is snobbery." Lucy's guilt, in Jane Austen's sight, is that she is greedy, mean, sycophantic, fundamentally false and cruel. Compare, if you please, Jane's dislike of her with her love for Fanny Price, equally poor, equally contaminated at the source by coarse relatives ; yet everyone at Mansfield, including the author, rejoices when Fanny can be welcomed at last as a daughter-in-law. Sir Thomas feels differently and feels wrongly in Chapter 1, but he too, like Emma, has to learn his lesson. "Self-knowledge, generosity and *humility*", these are the qualities of mind that Jane Austen sincerely extols above all others. And we read of Sir Thomas in the last chapter : "Sick of ambitions and mercenary connections, prizing more and more the sterling good of principles and tempers. . . ."

One more quotation and I have done : "It is remarkable to what an extent the plots and characters are dominated by questions of money. The whole opening of *Sense and Sensibility* turns upon the finance of the Dashwood will and the avarice of Mrs. John Dashwood, whose income is £10,000. The finances of the Bennet family and the entail in *Pride and Prejudice* have an equal importance."

Come, come ! The entail is of hardly any importance except to provide material for a few absurd, delicious speeches by Mrs. Bennet. Nor is *Sense and Sensibility* "dominated" by questions of money ; these do appear, but not to anything like the same extent as, for example, in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, the *Forsyte Saga*, and many of Balzac's novels. At a rough guess, I should say it was "dominated" by the difference in temperament between two sisters, the impetuous mistakes youth must make before it can achieve sense and self-control, and the downfall of a material and worldly point of view—the same spirit, in fact, as that which dominates Mr. E. M. Forster's *Howard's End*. G. B. S.

Miss Bingley's remarks on Elizabeth Bennet's petticoat—"six inches deep in mud, I am absolutely certain, and the gown which had been let down to hide it not doing its office"—inspires the reflection that most articles of feminine underwear started on the outside. Elizabeth's petticoat was meant to be visible, a part of the scheme of her dress, with the gown above it looped up to show either a contrasting or a blending colour and a different material. Sometimes the gown was slit down the front to display the petticoat beneath, and half a century earlier had been bunched high over it in panniers. It was not till Victorian times that the petticoat disappeared under the skirt. Stays, too, by Elizabeth's time invisible, started as outside wear, much in the style that still survives among certain European peasants, with the chemise visible above them.

Drawers were later than her day, but they also began as a visible article of dress, reaching the ankles and to be seen for several inches below the skirt, which finally dropped to the ground and swallowed them up as it had swallowed up the petticoat. The Victorian woman, therefore, wore no less than four unmentionable undergarments which had in their day not only been mentionable but plainly visible. By the time that her crinoline and bustle had shrunk away into modern streamlines and what was beneath might be expected to be revealed, it was found that these had shrunk too, contracting all four of them into a single scantie.

S. K.-S.

Elizabeth Bennet is of the same mettle—or metal, if you wish—as Shakespeare's Rosalind and Beatrice : she delights in the thrill and tingle of battle with the man she loves. Emma, too, conceived in the same spirit, can spar with Knightley and almost hold her own ; Mary had gladly done so with Edmund had she been given an opening. Fanny would have swooned at the very first encounter ; she could barely summon up enough spirit to reprove Henry, never to cross swords with him. But Elizabeth Bennet and Henry Crawford, had they ever been thrown together, that would have struck sparks, whether or no they loved, but the better match if they had. That would have been a Beatrice and Benedick to challenge the Tudor pair ! G. B. S.

Both G. B. Stern and I are impressed by the extreme plainness and scarcity of the Christian names in the novels. Jane Austen will use a name over and over again—even her own—rather, apparently, than find a new one. We have several repetitions of Mary or Maria, Jane, Elizabeth and Anne, many Georges and Williams and Johns. Sometimes we have a fashionable name of the period such as Louisa, Augusta, Sophia or Isabella, and once we have a Harriet ; but hardly ever do we get a Christian name that is at all out of the common. I can think only of Lydia and Penelope. Yet in an Index of Names drawn up by Mr. G. D. Johnston from the Wisborough Green Vicarage Documents (quoted in *Sussex Notes and Queries*, IX, 113) we find such names as Rhoda, Ursula, Letitia, Pheby, Vashti, Lois, Cecil, Archibald, Gabriel, Maurice, Harvey, Silvanus, Leonard, Christopher. All these were inhabitants of a small Sussex village in the eighteenth century. One is driven to the conclusion that Jane Austen was not interested in names as names. She merely wanted a handle to hold her characters by.

On the other hand there is evidence that she took trouble over finding attractive combinations of Christian and surname for her heroines—Elizabeth Bennet, Emma Woodhouse (Emma was a much more novel and romantic name in 1814 than it is to-day), Catherine Morland, Elinor



and Marianne Dashwood (these two romantic names date from a much earlier novel), Anne Elliot, are all pleasing and euphonious, and even Fanny Price, though plain, is not unattractive. The same applies to the names of the heroes. True, Henry Tilney is not much, but Fitzwilliam Darcy is grand—almost the grandest name in fiction. Edward Ferrars, Edmund Bertram, Mr. Knightley, Captain Wentworth . . . these two last sound better without their Christian names, and in Jane Austen's time a man's Christian name was less used than it is now. It is interesting, however, to note that the custom of a woman calling a male friend by his surname, which is followed by Jane herself in *Sense and Sensibility*, had become a vulgarity by the time *Emma* was written and allowed only on the lips of Mrs. Elton. S. K.-S.

Jane Austen evidently has little admiration for those women who declare themselves champions of their own sex. I gather this from the fact that the two most definitely "feminist" speeches in the novels are on the lips of Miss Bingley and Mrs. Elton. The former says: "Eliza Bennet is one of those young ladies who seek to recommend themselves to the other sex by undervaluing their own . . . in my opinion it is a paltry device, a very mean art." While the latter proclaims: "I always take the part of my own sex; I do, indeed. I give you notice, you will find me a formidable antagonist on that point. I always stand up for women." Jane Austen obviously doubts the sincerity of both these women and probably of all who make similar speeches. S. K.-S.

However often I may re-read Jane Austen, I am for ever discovering some new small proof of genius in a sentence. I have just found a gem of irony: it occurs after the scene in *Persuasion* where Frederick and Louisa go nutting down the hedgerow and (his subconscious still sore over the loss of Anne) he extols in an exaggerated style her firmness, decision and strength of mind. Then, a little later, in family conclave: "Louisa being now armed with the idea of merit in maintaining her own way. . . ." G. B. S.

(Jane Austen is particularly sensitive to that shameful emotion which overwhelms us when our nearest and dearest choose to make exhibitions of themselves. She stresses this form of misery only a little less forcibly than the joys of family affection.) The main example, of course, is in *Pride and Prejudice*, where both Jane and Elizabeth suffer so much and so constantly from the behaviour of their parents and sisters. But there is a striking instance in *Mansfield Park*, where Fanny Price is miserably aware of her family's deficiencies, to the point of blessing Crawford for declining her father's invitation to "eat his mutton" with them. "To

have had him join their family dinner party, and see all their deficiencies, would have been dreadful ! Rebecca's cookery and Rebecca's waiting, and Betsey's eating at table without restraint and pulling everything about as she chose, were what Fanny herself was not yet enough inured to for her often to make a tolerable meal." That Crawford should not behold these things plunged her, we are told, into " a state of actual felicity from escaping so horrible an evil ". This, with Elizabeth Bennet's feeling " that years of happiness could not make Jane or herself amends for moments of such painful confusion ", may sound exaggerated ; it is balanced by Eleanor Tilney's curious acceptance of her father's commands in the matter of Catherine's ejection. One can imagine what the comments of a modern daughter would be ! The Tilneys evidently *were* ashamed of their father, but we are not shown their secret thoughts, as we are shown Fanny's and Elizabeth's—and only in those thoughts and not in any outward revolt of manner did any embarrassment or criticism exist. To Jane, Elizabeth and Fanny, any complaint to others would have been disloyalty.

S. K.-S.

I could preach a sermon on each of the following texts :

" Elinor agreed with it all, for she did not think he deserved the compliment of rational opposition." *Sense and Sensibility*, Chap. XXXVI.

" It was not to be doubted that poor Harriet's attachment had been an offering to conjugal unreserve." *Emma*, Chap. XXXIII.

" She met with nothing, however, to distress or frighten her. Her youth, civil manners, and liberal pay procured her all the attention that a traveller like herself could require." *Northanger Abbey*, Chap. XXIX.

" Mrs. Norris consoled herself for the loss of her husband by considering that she could do very well without him." *Mansfield Park*, Chap. III.

" Of pride, indeed, there was perhaps scarcely enough : his indifference to a confusion of rank bordered too much on inelegance of mind." *Emma*, Chap. XXIV.

I have also found great moral support, especially during air-raids, in the following dialogue—

MRS. BENNET : If it were not for the entail, I should not mind it.

MR. BENNET : What should not you mind ?

MRS. BENNET : I should not mind anything at all.

MR. BENNET : Let us be thankful that you are preserved from a state of such insensibility.

*Pride and Prejudice*, Chap. XXIII. S. K.-S.

Rebecca West writes of Jane Austen : " To believe her limited in

range because she was harmonious in method is as sensible as to imagine that when the Atlantic Ocean is as smooth as a mill-pond it shrinks to the size of a mill-pond.”

G. B. S.

Mrs. Elton's irresistible activity and undefeatable officiousness on behalf of Jane Fairfax, and Miss Bates's humble gratitude and acceptance of her efforts combine in anticipatory illustration of Nietzsche's aphorism : “ A great mind hates to confer a benefit : a small mind hates to receive one.”

S. K.-S.

### (3) ANSWERS TO JANE AUSTEN QUIZ

1. A Moor Park—seven shillings.

2. (a) Mary, Henry, Penelope, Richard, Anne, Hetty, Charles, William, Philip, Charles, John.

(b) Mrs. Smith, Mr. Rushworth, Mr. and Mrs. Bennet, General Tilney, Mr. Gardiner (Mrs. Gardiner has only the initial M.), Mr. Weston, Col. Brandon.

(c) Hamilton, Ward, Hawkins, Jennings, Darcy.

(d) Anne Elliot, Anne Steele, Anne Thorpe, Anne Weston, Anne de Bourgh—Jane Bennet, Jane Fairfax—Charles Musgrove and Junior, Charles Bingley, Charles Hayter, Charles Smith, Charles Maddox, Charles Price—Maria Lucas, Maria Thorpe, Maria Bertram, Lady Bertram—Elizabeth Bennet, Elizabeth Elliot—Anna Weston, Anna Maria Middleton—William Price, William Larkin, William Middleton, William Collins, Sir William Lucas, William (Walter) Elliot—Henry Woodhouse, Henry Knightley, Henry Tilney, Henry Dashwood—Sophy.

(e) Moland's—Ford's—Gray's.

3. (1) When Sir Thomas asks Fanny at what time she would like the carriage to take her to dinner at the Parsonage, just after Aunt Norris has been telling her that she will certainly have to walk. (2) When Sir Thomas announces he will give a ball for William and Fanny Price, just after Mrs. Norris has proclaimed he would not give one while his daughters were away. (3) When Baddeley insists it is Miss Price who is wanted in the library, just after Mrs. Norris has told her not to push herself forward as it is *she* who is required.

4. (a) Her design for a table was not as good as Georgiana Darcy's, (b) she was Mrs. Smith's landlady, (c) she was a treasure of a governess recommended and placed by Lady Catherine, (d) Captain Tilney jilts Isabella to flirt with her, (e) courted by Wickham for her £10,000, (f) she was the aunt of Miss Gray, Willoughby's bride, (g) she and her

sister Mrs. Fraser were Mary Crawford's two great friends in London, (h) residents in the neighbourhood of Northanger Abbey, (i) neighbours of the Sucklings at Maple Grove, (j) Captain Wentworth might have been asked to give her a passage from Lisbon.

5. Chapter 3. "I really cannot be plaguing myself for ever with all the new poems and states of the nation." A complaint by Elizabeth Elliot of Lady Russell, who "quite bored" her by insisting on lending her new publications.

Chapter 5. General Tilney tells Catherine that "though as careless on such subjects as most people, he did look upon a tolerably large eating-room as one of the necessities of life".

Chapter 7. "'The sweets of housekeeping in a country village' said Miss Crawford archly. 'Commend me to the nurseryman and the poulterer.'" Part of a discussion on the respective merits of town and country life between Mary and Mrs. Grant, occasioned by the latter's anxiety about her plants and the turkey which the cook says must be eaten immediately owing to the unseasonably mild weather.

Chapter 8. "To Jane herself there could be no possibility of objection . . . her understanding excellent, her mind improved, her manner captivating." Part of Elizabeth's angry musings after hearing from Colonel Fitzwilliam that Darcy had done all he could to separate Jane and Bingley.

Chapter 9. At supper at the Netherfield Ball, Mr. Collins remarks: "If I were so fortunate as to be able to sing, I should have great pleasure, I am sure, in obliging the company with an air; for I consider music a very innocent diversion and completely compatible with the profession of a clergyman."

Chapter 10. "Everybody at all addicted to letter-writing, without having much to say . . . must feel with Lady Bertram." Comment by the author on her ladyship's bad luck on having the news of the Grants' departure for Bath already told Fanny by Edmund.

Chapter 11. When Mr. Weston is announcing to Mrs. Elton after the Hartfield dinner-party his son's coming visit he says, "I hope you will be pleased with my son; but you must not expect a prodigy. He is generally thought a fine young man, but do not expect a prodigy."

Chapter 12. When Frank Churchill is mending Mrs. Bates's spectacles and those present are discussing the mysterious present of a piano to Jane Fairfax he says: "Conjecture! Ay, sometimes one conjectures right and sometimes one conjectures

wrong. I wish I could conjecture how soon I shall make this rivet quite firm."

Chapter 13. Mrs. Smith, explaining the source of her information as to the supposed engagement between Anne and Mr. Elliot, says that it does not come in a direct line from Colonel Wallis—"it takes a bend or two, but nothing of consequence".

6. (a) Butler at Mansfield Park, (b) coachman to Mr. Woodhouse, (c) housekeeper to the Bennets, (d) housekeeper to Mr. Bingley, (e) imaginary housekeeper in the story Henry Tilney tells Catherine on the drive to Northanger, (f) manservant to Mrs. Dashwood, (g) the Eltons' housekeeper, (h) upper servant of two at Mrs. Price's, (i) maid to Lady Catherine de Bourgh, (j) cook at Hartfield, (k) housekeeper at Donwell Abbey, (l) Lady Bertram's maid, (m) general servant at the Bateses', (n) estate carpenter at Mansfield Park, (o) nursery maid to Mrs. Charles Musgrove, (p) footman to Mr. Knightley, (q) gardener at Mansfield Parsonage.

7. "A fair chance through the Spicers of getting something from the Bishop in the course of a year or two. . . . He is the eldest son : whenever my uncle dies, he steps into very pretty property. The estate at Winthrop is not less than 250 acres, besides the farm near Taunton, which is some of the best land in the country."

8. (a) By John, Isabella and Maria Thorpe and James Morland in two gigs, James driving Isabella and John driving Maria.

(b) By Emma and Harriet in the Hartfield carriage, Mrs. Elton, Jane Fairfax and Miss Bates in the Eltons' carriage, Mr. Knightley, Mr. Weston and Frank Churchill on horseback. It is not absolutely clear whether Mr. Elton rode or drove.

(c) By Mary, Louisa and Henrietta Musgrove and Anne Elliot in Mr. Musgrove's coach, Charles Musgrove and Captain Wentworth in Charles's curricule.

(d) By Catherine Morland, Eleanor Tilney and Eleanor's maid in the Tilney family coach and Henry Tilney and the General in Henry's curricule as far as Petty France, after which Catherine and the General changed places.

(e) By Catherine Morland alone in a post-chaise.

(f) By Mrs. Jennings and Elinor and Marianne Dashwood in Mrs. Jennings's coach.

(g) By Mrs. Norris, Fanny, Maria and Julia Bertram and Henry Crawford in Crawford's barouche, with Edmund following on horseback.

(h) By Anne and Lucy Steele and Dr. Davies in a post-chaise.

(i) By Jane Bennet on horseback—by Elizabeth Bennet on foot—

by Mrs. Bennet and her two younger daughters in the family coach.

- (j) On horseback by all the young people at Mansfield Parsonage and Mansfield Park, except Fanny Price.
9. (a) In *Mansfield Park*, Fanny quotes it to Edmund in connection with the threatened destruction of the avenue at Sotherton.
- (b) In *Persuasion* when Anne Elliot places herself at the concert in the Octagon Room much nearer the end of the bench than before, she cannot avoid comparing herself "with Miss Larolles, the inimitable Miss Larolles".
  - (c) In *Mansfield Park* when Fanny goes up to bed before the ball is over, she stops "at the entrance door, like the Lady of Branhholm Hall, one moment and no more, to view the happy scene".
  - (d) In *Northanger Abbey* when Catherine is trying to talk about books to John Thorpe, he says of *Camilla* (which at first he confuses with *The Mysteries of Udolpho*)—"such unnatural stuff! an old man playing at see-saw . . . there is nothing in the world in it but an old man's playing at see-saw and learning Latin".
  - (e) In *Emma*, she is discussing with Mr. Knightley Mrs. Weston's future education of her child—"she had had the advantage, you know, of practising on me, like La Baronne d'Almane on La Comtesse d'Ostalis, in Madame de Genlis's '*Adelaide et Theodore*'."
10. (a) Of Mary Musgrove by Sir Walter Elliot to Anne—(b) of Robert Ferrars by Lucy Steele to Elinor Dashwood—(c) of Jane Fairfax by Emma to Mr. Knightley—(d) of Elizabeth Bennet by Miss Bingley to Darcy—(e) of Henry Crawford by Mr. Rushworth to Fanny Price—(f) of Isabella Thorpe by Henry Tilney to Catherine Morland.

11. *Horses*: In *Pride and Prejudice*, in order that Jane may ride to Netherfield on horseback, Mrs. Bennet urges Mr. Bennet to say that the carriage horses are wanted on the farm. Jane catches a bad cold as the result of her ride, and has to remain at Netherfield.

In *Mansfield Park* there is much about riding. Fanny first learns to ride on the "old grey pony", then has a mare allotted to her by Edmund, who when he sees she is without a mount, scorns Mrs. Norris's suggestion that "some steady old thing might be found among the numbers belonging to the Park" or that Dr. Grant might lend the pony he sent to the post, and exchanges his third horse (a "useful road-horse") for

one that will carry a lady. Later on Fanny is deprived of the use of this by Miss Crawford's eagerness to learn to ride, and there is a small crisis with a contrite Edmund, who was "very seriously resolved, however unwilling he must be to check a pleasure of Miss Crawford's, that it should never happen again".

Mrs. Norris, in order to divert Sir Thomas's mind from her connivance at the Mansfield Park theatricals, tells him of her share in bringing about the engagement between Maria and Rushworth—even to the point of dragging Lady Bertram to call at Sotherton. "What with frost and snow upon beds of stones, it was worse than anything you can imagine. . . . And then the poor horses too ! To see them straining away ! You know how I always feel for the horses"—and goes on to describe how at the bottom of Sandcroft Hill "I got out and walked up. I did indeed. . . . I could not bear to sit at my ease and be dragged up at the expense of those noble animals."

On the occasion of William Price's visit, Henry Crawford very generously mounts him on one of his own hunters, greatly to Fanny's perturbation and his own delight.

In *Northanger Abbey* there is a great deal of knowing talk about horses and gigs by John Thorpe. He is always boasting of his horse's speed and prowess. He describes Henry Tilney as driving "some very pretty cattle".

On the drive home from Clifton we are told that James Morland's horse was so lame that he could hardly get it along.

Catherine Morland is bored by the long bait at Petty France, necessary because the General is not travelling post, but with his own horses.

In *Sense and Sensibility* Marianne has a mare, Queen Mab, offered her by Willoughby, and Elinor has some difficulty in persuading her to decline it.

In *Emma* Mr. Woodhouse is perpetually anxious over the fatigue of his horses—to the point that he can hardly bear to have them put to. When speaking of a visit to Randalls his first thought is "where are the poor horses to be while we are paying our visit ?" and he is comforted only by Emma's reassurance that "they are to be put in Mr. Weston's stable". When she is trying to recommend the idea of the ball at the Crown she uses the argument that "it will be very convenient for the horses—they will be so near their own stable".

At the Coles's dinner-party Emma is delighted to see Mr. Knightley arrive in his own carriage, with horses hired for the occasion. We are told that he kept no horses of his own, "having little spare money and a great deal of health, activity and independence".

A lame carriage-horse delays the expedition to Box Hill—we are not told whether it was the Eltons' or Mr. Woodhouse's.

When Frank Churchill is late at the Donwell Abbey strawberry party, Mrs. Weston is anxious, for "she had some fears of his horse . . . she could not be cured of wishing that he would part with his black mare".

In *Persuasion* there is no particular mention of horses.

*Dogs*: There is a remarkable absence of dog-life in the novels, and practically all the dogs mentioned are gun-dogs, except Lady Bertram's "Pug" in *Mansfield Park*, which is Jane Austen's solitary specimen of a lap-dog. In *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine arrives at Woodston to find Henry with "the friends of his solitude—a large Newfoundland puppy and two or three terriers", and later in the day there is "a charming game of play with a litter of puppies just able to roll about". In *Sense and Sensibility* we hear a certain amount of Willoughby's pointer so much admired by Sir John Middleton, and in *Persuasion* the shooting party of gentlemen comes back early, having had their sport spoiled by a young dog—which leads to the whole company taking that memorable autumn walk together. There are no dogs in *Emma* or *Pride and Prejudice*.

*Poultry*: In *Pride and Prejudice* this seems to be emphasised as a compensation for Charlotte Collins's unenviable lot. After visiting her at Hunsford, Elizabeth realises that "her home and her housekeeping, her parish and her poultry, and all their dependent concerns, had not yet lost their charms". On the Miss Bennets' return to Longbourn we hear Lady Lucas inquiring "after the welfare and poultry of her eldest daughter".

In *Mansfield Park* Mrs. Norris plans to set the four pheasants' eggs she has sponged at Sotherton "under the first spare hen"—meaning Sir Thomas's, of course, for "if they come to good I can have them moved to my own house and borrow a coop".

In *Emma*, her immediate marriage to Mr. Knightley is



made possible by the robbery of Mrs. Weston's poultry house "of all her turkeys. . . . Other poultry yards in the neighbourhood also suffered. Pilfering was *house-breaking* to Mr. Woodhouse's fears . . . and but for the sense of his son-in-law's protection [he] would have been in wretched alarm."

In *Sense and Sensibility* we are told that Charlotte Palmer found "fresh sources of merriment" in "the disappointed hopes of her dairymaid, by hens forsaking their nests, or being stolen by a fox, or in the rapid decease of a promising young brood".

12. (1) Mr. Knightley and Mrs. Weston.  
(2) Mr. Elton, Mr. Woodhouse, Mr. John Knightley, Mr. Weston.  
(3) Mrs. John Knightley, Frank Churchill, Jane Fairfax, Mrs. Elton, Mr. and Mrs. Cole.

## CHAPTER XIV

### *G. B. Stern Takes Leave of Jane Austen*

I HAVE often wondered whether we are first interested in the books of an author because we happen to chance on a book about the books of this author, or whether it more often works out that, on the contrary, we would never dream of reading *about* this author's books unless first of all we had read and re-read them till they were as friendly as our own house and garden? I am inclined to think, now, that it must be that way round; and that no stranger, therefore, will think of reading this book about Jane Austen and thus be lured up unfamiliar avenues towards *Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma*, *Persuasion* and her other three volumes of enchantment. If I am right, then we can count on our readers as a true lovers' knot around us, and not feel that we need check ourselves by perpetually laying out a clearer plan to benefit those who are not familiar with our lovely territory. You must believe, and you will, I know, that I am not seeking an excuse for mere laziness; though it may be that I am excusing myself for the amount of quotation; too much for those who do not know their Jane Austen well, and may complain that they do not desire such quantities removed from the true context, as they hope afterwards to be reading the very books for themselves, and would prefer the dew left on in pinpoint drops; but then I have just persuaded myself that here is a group who will not arrive at their Jane Austen along this route; and as for the true lovers, I need not fear I have been quoting too lavishly for their taste, for I can be sure that, defying Euclid, the part to them is as great as the whole; the arc as the complete circle; or to put it without metaphor, every quotation from Jane Austen is as good as the complete volume, because it instantly calls up the magic of the atmosphere, the scene, the characters, the details, the flow of life which led up to the incident or the remark, the whole world of *Emma* or the whole world of *Persuasion*; nor do they have to apply themselves, these lovers, to the task of meticulously reading every line of quotation; they will know it; the eye will pick up a word, seize half a paragraph, remember the rest, set it instantly in the place as it was meant, to illustrate whatever point I had in mind, or as a criticism, an argument, a burst of pure delight; smile swiftly; agree, perhaps; or make a note that presently they are going to quarrel with me as I do not know in the least what I am talking about . . . and then let the eye fly

on again. For lovers of Jane, walking in their own garden, will know that bean-row over there, half in slanted sunshine, half in shadow, without sitting down to count the beans.

Lovers of Jane Austen ; a lovers' knot ; the Janeites. Do you recall Kipling's story and the poem that came after ? I doubt if it be one of his truly good poems as poetry goes ; like, for instance, *The Road Through the Woods*, or the Elizabethan *Valour and Innocence* ; nevertheless it is deeply satisfactory, especially to those who place *Persuasion* as their favourite of her novels, and look on Captain Wentworth as the one man whom she would be glad to welcome in heaven, since, for some sorrowful reason, he could not be married to her on earth.

I may not quote Mr. Kipling, for neither he nor his executors permit it (not if it was ever so !), but perhaps I can explain without violating that enclosed square with the high railings guarding it so grimly, that Sheila Kaye-Smith and I had once desired to call this book of ours : " Who Loves Jane ? " believing it to be a line of his poem where the call goes out from heaven round the world, heaven seeing that she was not yet perfectly happy after her recent arrival. After his prohibition stopped us, we made the discovery that we were misquoting ; and that the coveted line of Kipling was in the past tense, not the present. " Who Loves Jane ? " was, in fact, a title of our own invention ; and as such, we did not care to take the responsibility of being accused of a bend towards feminine sentimental whimsy, even though it happened " exactly so " (as Mr. Elton might have said, to Emma's irritation) ; exactly setting forth what we hope we are doing, sending out a call through the world : " Who Loves Jane ? "—not in whimsicality, but a brief, clear, preliminary statement calling in the audience whom we hope to draw around us ; warning off those who might be misled and have no means to return our book to the library for several days, and yet have no interest in it whatever, or else a too severe and scholarly interest : a research-and-verify-and-fresh-facts-have-just-come-to-light sort of interest. No fresh facts have come to light ; a few fresh feelings, perhaps ; a conjecture or two. Conjecture may be a sin ; I do not know. If it is, forgive me.

I said just now that *Persuasion* was my favourite of the six novels. Did I mean that, I wonder, or do I mean, in reality, *Emma* ? Let me see, how does the list go in the order of my preference ? First *Persuasion* and then *Emma*, or else first *Emma* and then *Persuasion*, and next—but they all come rushing together now—next *Mansfield Park*, in spite of my brutal lack of sympathy for Fanny and Edmund ; but there is so much meat in *Mansfield Park*, and the story is so good until the swerve away into the final hurried chapters, and the humour so experienced and ironic

and delicately placed. *Sense and Sensibility* appears next, very closely following *Mansfield Park*; and that has been promoted; it used to be down at the bottom of my list; I find that nearly everyone I question on this subject has passed through the same change; they nearly all liked *Sense and Sensibility* least, and afterwards reconsidered the verdict. There are moments when I would place it higher than *Mansfield Park*. Anyhow, they all pair off; and for the last two, the liveliest and most youthful two, *Northanger Abbey* and *Pride and Prejudice* (but in Jane Austen the last must be almost as the first, and the first nearly as the last; they are all without peer). *Pride and Prejudice* has perhaps been a little over-read; it is everybody's favourite; we have seen it as a play and as a film; in England and in America; it appears in more prose anthologies than the other five; Elizabeth Bennet is the world's sweetheart. As for *Northanger Abbey*, for the life of me I cannot see why it should not be nearer the head of the list, except that we must give in to the fact that the miracle half-dozen cannot all come jostling to the top; and I may have been guided by a sub-conscious idea that her youngest heroine must for a time be content with a low chair where she can sit and listen politely while the others talk. *Northanger Abbey* is, as a matter of fact, perfectly delightful, with its scenes of fashionable Bath that break the heart nowadays, for a reason of which Jane Austen herself can never have dreamt; with its teasing yet chivalrous hero, Henry Tilney, and Catherine, a child all innocence and honesty, learning about life and making her passionate but never irretrievable mistakes; and that compendium of vanity and fickleness, Isabella Thorpe; a self-seeking beauty, giving herself away with every line her mischievous creator causes her to utter.

*Emma* and *Persuasion*, *Mansfield Park* and *Sense and Sensibility*, *Northanger Abbey* and *Pride and Prejudice* . . . there they go. "Favourite" was a favourite word with Jane Austen herself; it recurs in her letters and in the books themselves: "It will be a favourite with me, I believe, from this moment," said Henry Crawford about Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*, because Fanny had listened with her blue eyes at last fixed on him with attention and even respect while he read aloud to Lady Bertram. If asked forty years later in his forgetful old age: "What is your favourite play of Shakespeare?" Mr. Crawford might have had much ado in remembering why his unconscious prompted him to the immediate reply: "*Henry VIII*."

*Emma* is, I believe, my favourite Jane Austen because it is my happiest escape. In *Emma* I can lose myself. There is so little sorrow in it. Its high spirits are so infectious. Its story can so completely absorb; record of the daily normal sequence of days spent in Highbury, so enthralling

to us for whom, since the war began, to-morrow can hardly ever be a continuation of to-day.

For continuity must be an essential of happiness ; and confidence that while we plan we do not plan defiantly on the perilous rim of catastrophe. If to-day were happiness but if we already knew to-morrow to be the end of happiness, to-day would then be too sharply mixed with pain and suspense ; too nearly resemble being in love. I cannot reckon love in a landscape of happiness, but would rather present by some other word those strange, unreal, ecstatic periods ; call them rapture, delirium, a glory and a glamour and a solemn joy. Being in love is the swoop of a plane over high mountains, swiftly down and up again, soaring through clouds and above the clouds and leaving the clouds in a billowing silver floor below, while you see the sun by lonely privilege.

But a state of pure happiness, as I remember it, is more like a little boat that moves along a winding stream through kinder quieter landscapes, meadows on either side, shining buttercups, a moorhen launching herself and her small noisy family from behind the roots of an overhanging willow. . . . Happiness when we think of it nowadays, far down and behind the arches of the last few years, may be, I believe, quite easily, quite simply defined as normality in a normal world ; the world of Jane Austen's *Emma*, my favourite of all her books ; the world where "as usual" stood as the tender magic, the open sesame, the abracadabra necessary to summon happiness.

✓ *Persuasion* is undoubtedly lovelier than *Emma*, deeper, the landscape flowing to a further horizon. Anne Elliot did not have to be forgiven so much as Emma, though she endured more before her reward came in the end ; but her nostalgia and longing for happiness, in spite of having learnt well to do without, is so strong that it cannot, in our own present state of mind, provide such wonderful escape into a place of laughter and nonsense, where foolish, kindly characters dwell together in a group gathered round such an engaging, dear, delicious, idiotic heroine as Emma, enamoured of her own wisdom and management, ludicrously ignorant (until the last chapters) of her own young ignorance. Anne Elliot had to suffer the cruelty of neglect, but Emma Woodhouse is adored and indulged by nearly everyone, by her father and sister, by Mrs. Weston and Mr. Knightley and Miss Bates and Harriet Smith ; how good, then, to be Emma, and how good to slip away into the pages of *Emma*—my favourite, though I love *Persuasion* more. That is now triumphantly settled.

It seemed for the moment important to have settled it ; in five minutes it will not matter. I do not know who is my favourite character

in Jane Austen, and I have too many favourite lines ; but I believe I could select a few of my favourite scenes without agony of indecision : for instance, the wicked comedy of Mr. and Mrs. John Dashwood debating on how little they can possibly allow his mother and sisters, reducing the amount shred by shred, until a brace of pheasant suffices, and an offer of help in moving their furniture. I would add to this, also for social comedy, the dinner-party at the Westons' where Mr. John Knightley is out of temper, Mr. Woodhouse trembles with apprehension that he may be buried in a snowdrift on his way home, and Emma is amazed to receive Mr. Elton's proposal which she had confidently intended for Harriet. The agony of Marianne waiting in suspense for a visit from Willoughby and then receiving her own letters back from him is, I should say, my favourite scene for tragedy, though too painful for enjoyment except at such artistry. (For drama, I should choose the famous episode at Lyme Regis where Louisa falls from the Cobb, and especially all those delightful scenes preceding it, shot with sunshine and sparkling sea-air, where Anne begins to recover some of her bloom and hopefulness ; and for breathless tension and glorious relief, nothing can rival that last scene of *Persuasion* (written and re-written three times before the author was satisfied), at the hotel in Bath, where Captain Wentworth writes his letter to Anne while she stands beside him talking to Captain Harville and unconsciously discloses what is in her faithful heart, —

We are all selfish and desire most of all our own happiness or the happiness of those dearer to us than ourselves ; but if I could be granted a wish which can only be used on behalf of someone not personally known to me, and if, moreover, I were not fettered in this wish by consideration of time and possibility, I would care most to use it on behalf of Jane Austen, that she might in her own life have the same hour of happiness which came to Anne ; even to let it come in the same manner, for I feel that neither Providence nor myself could invent anything better. Yet it is a comfort to know that in a different way happiness indeed was with her a little before the end, when she wrote : "If I live to be an old Woman, I must expect to wish I had died now ; blessed in the tenderness of such a Family, and before I had survived either them or their affection."

## CHAPTER XV

### *Sheila Kaye-Smith Takes Leave of Jane Austen*

THERE is one subject which true Janeites never weary of discussing, though as far as my own experience goes no discussion has ever been brought to a satisfactory conclusion. By this I do not mean that it has never been settled ; on the contrary, it is always settled much too easily. There is very little difference of opinion among Jane-lovers as to the relative merits of the six novels. You are not likely to find any one of them maintaining that *Mansfield Park* and *Northanger Abbey* are flawless and none of the rest is worth reading, or that *Sense and Sensibility* is a finer book than *Persuasion*. As a body we are agreed that the standard is very even and very high ; none of the novels is disappointing, but if a list were to be drawn up either *Pride and Prejudice* or *Sense and Sensibility* would be at the bottom and either *Emma* or *Persuasion* at the top.

Having written that much, I am now uncertain as to whether *Northanger Abbey* would not take the place of *Pride and Prejudice* as an alternative to *Sense and Sensibility* at the bottom of many lists. A number of Janeites have doubtless been influenced by the popular esteem of this latter work, and would therefore rate it higher than the less-known and less-admired *Northanger Abbey*. Perhaps G. B. Stern and I are unique in our opinion of *Pride and Prejudice*. We would both of us put it in the lowest place. I have given elsewhere the reasons why, in my opinion, it is so well beloved by those who do not otherwise understand and appreciate Jane Austen. Here I am more concerned with my own reasons for putting it at the bottom of my list. Some of these reasons may be the very ones that have made it popular.

The two main romances—between Elizabeth and Darcy and between Jane and Bingley—are both of them about as convincing as the romance between Cinderella and Prince Charming, of which, indeed, they are recognizable versions (with Mrs. Hurst and Miss Bingley as the wicked sisters ?—Mrs. Bennet as the Baron ?—and Mrs. Gardiner as the Fairy Godmother ? . . .). The two heroes, though both alive and according to their different measures attractive, do not always behave in a credible manner. Darcy is vitiated by his proposal. I simply cannot believe that any man would so insult the lady of his choice by the very terms in which he asked her to marry him, no matter how sure of her he might

feel. Mr. Collins, with his cheerful insistence on taking no for an affirmative answer, puts a far lighter strain on our credulity.

"He spoke well, but there were feelings besides those of the heart to be detailed, and he was not more eloquent on the subject of tenderness than of pride. His sense of her inferiority, of its being a degradation, of the family obstacles which judgment had always opposed to inclination, were dwelt on with a warmth which seemed due to the consequence he was wounding, but was very unlikely to recommend his suit."

It certainly was; and I frankly cannot believe that any man—let alone a sensible man, and Darcy is always represented as a sensible man—would have dwelt on such a subject at such a moment. Nor do I believe that Elizabeth's feelings would have been so easily soothed by his letter, which though it gave quite a convincing explanation of his behaviour to Wickham and a less convincing one of his behaviour to Jane and Bingley, only enlarged his offence towards her family. Least of all can I believe in the sudden and complete reformation of a man who, it seems, had neither the brains nor the breeding to avoid insulting his beloved's relations in the same breath as he declared his love.

No, I cannot quite believe in Darcy—possibly because as a child I never liked fairy-tales. I think that many people do not dislike the incredible in fiction for the very reason that it reminds them of the fairy-tales which delighted their childhood. Hence the popularity of *Pride and Prejudice* is based on, rather than qualified by, the fact that contains at least two situations which belong, if not to faery, at least to romance rather than to real life.

The second incredible situation is that between Jane and Bingley. A misunderstanding between lovers kept apart by officious and jealous friends, who misrepresent motives and suppress information, is a stock dilemma of fiction, and I must say that Jane Austen makes it appear much more convincing than usual. We never feel that a single moment of common sense on either side would have ended it. But we are left with the suspicion that Bingley is not only weak-willed but weak-witted, or he would never have so implicitly believed Darcy's statement on a subject of which he could have known nothing. Again, I feel I am tearing the stuff of faery to pieces; but we must remember that in Jane Austen we have a writer who is on principle an unswerving realist. Her convictions on this point are the inspiration of *Northanger Abbey*, so we surely have a right to criticise when she herself is guilty (though in how superior a manner!) of the faults she satirizes in her contemporaries. It is just this fairy-tale technique, combined with a certain perfunctoriness in contrivance (the most glaring example of



which G. B. Stern has enlarged upon, so I will say no more about it) which makes me rate this novel lower than either of those two which are usually at the bottom of the list.

But to be bottom in the Jane Austen class does not mean that one would fail to graduate with honours among other competitors. I can love *Pride and Prejudice* least and yet love it very much indeed. If it has faults which do not appear in some of the other books it also has all the author's most entrancing qualities—her wit, both caustic and light-hearted, her observation, her warm family feeling, her power of giving life both to characters and to social scenes. The book contains some of the most satisfying dialogue in all the novels. I single out the occasional bouts of conversation between Mr. and Mrs. Bennet, Mr. Collins's proposal, the general talk in the drawing-room at Netherfield when Miss Bingley is, in vulgar language not her own, trying to get off with Mr. Darcy, and the gems that fall at Rosings from the lips of Lady Catherine de Bourgh.

*Pride and Prejudice* also has the advantage of a truly lovable heroine. I always feel that Elizabeth Bennet is the Jane Austen heroine I personally should most delight to meet. Catherine Morland is sweet, but a little too ingenuous for free exchanges with anyone more than twice her age, Fanny is too creep-mouse, Marianne too ardent, Elinor too priggish, for my personal taste; and I should feel a little afraid of Emma—I am by no means sure that I should come up to her standards. Anne Elliot is perhaps the most truly admirable and amiable of all the heroines; but, unlike G. B. Stern, I cannot satisfy myself that she had a sense of humour. Elizabeth, with her saucy wit, with that faint, faint but so comfortable touch of vulgarity which she alone of all the heroines is allowed to possess, with her warm heart, her stout spirit, her loyalty, her gaiety, her sense, is to me one of the most endearing characters, not only in Jane Austen's novels but in all fiction.

It seems almost ungracious to put the novel in which she appears at the bottom of my list, and certainly I have had to write a very great deal to justify myself—to the point, I think, of appearing to exaggerate the novel's faults. But I have to hold my position not only against Elizabeth Bennet, and against the heathen who break my heart by praising *Pride and Prejudice* and finding the other novels unreadable, but also against those practising Janeites who would give the lowest place to *Sense and Sensibility*.

I believe that the majority would do this. It has perhaps fewer admirers among true Jane-addicts than any of the novels—certainly fewer than it deserves. For I now have another opinion to justify, the opinion that *Sense and Sensibility* is the finest of the three earlier novels—the

three that were written before Jane Austen's removal to Bath and the silence that overtook her there. I own that at a first reading—especially if, as in my case, one reads it after *Emma* and *Mansfield Park*—it does not show all its beauties. It is the most definitely old-fashioned and formal in style of the novels, and certain episodes, such as Colonel Brandon's story introduced as a story-within-a-story, according to the precedent of Richardson and other earlier writers, remove some of that difference between Jane and her contemporaries which is always so much in her favour. There is also an old-fashioned note in Marianne's reformation after her illness—the author has not made it really convincing. The book moreover suffers from a most unattractive hero, and Edward's senseless loyalty to Lucy Steele is a tax not only on credibility but on patience. I think, too, that Elinor is somewhat over-righteous for most people's taste. It was not till I had read the book several times that I began to like her. All these drawbacks doubtless account for the comparatively low esteem in which *Sense and Sensibility* is held by many otherwise faithful disciples.

But, for me, it has a quality which is shared by no other Jane Austen novel except *Persuasion*—the quality of emotion. When I read of the love of Marianne for Willoughby I am conscious of that same stirring of the heart which I feel when reading of the love of Anne Elliot for Captain Wentworth. *Persuasion* is held by many readers to be unique in its revelation of depths below the tranquil scene. But I maintain that we also have a glimpse of those depths in *Sense and Sensibility*—unless you are one of those people who cannot take seriously the extreme sorrows of extreme youth.

Marianne's grief for Willoughby—her agonies first of anxiety, then of despair—her loyalty which will doubt nothing till the evidence has seared away its innocence in a flame of deliberate cruelty—all these to me are utterly moving, these and Elinor's sympathy, through which one sees it all.

The emotions of *Persuasion* are differently pitched—they are the emotions of maturity, of intelligence, of a gentle disillusioned heart. Comparing the two novels is like comparing the mists of autumn with an April storm—one of those sudden hailstorms which destroys the budding growth of spring. For the sorrows of youth are not short-lived in their consequences. They are more destructive in their effect on the growing organism than the sorrows of middle age; and I, for one, do not believe that Marianne ever really recovered from her love of Willoughby, even after years of being Mrs. Brandon.

Apart from its emotional quality, the book is rich in living characters and entertaining scenes. There are few more captivating people in all

the novels than warm-hearted, romantic Mrs. Dashwood, of whom it is said "that indeed a man could not very well be in love with either of her daughters, without extending the passion to her". I also have a weakness for the Miss Steeles, especially poor Anne—"as good a soul as ever breathed, but no conjuror". She makes only a few appearances, but how clearly we see her in all her vulgarity and good nature, in her pettiness—her folly—down to the moment when, thrown out in disgrace from the Dashwood home after having recklessly "popped out" the story of Lucy's engagement, her main concern is lest "your sister should ask us for the huswifes she had gave us a day or two before". Poor Anne! I know Jane Austen did not mean me to like her, but I can't help doing so.

In the matter of Mrs. Jennings I feel I have more of her creator's blessing. She makes an unpromising start at Sir John Middleton's, where she is merely inquisitive and ill bred, but when she moves to London, moves also into favour with the reader and, I suspect, with the author; till, in the end, having seen her in all her simple warm-heartedness and motherly devotion to the sick Marianne, we are at last with Elinor allowed to love her.

As for Marianne herself, she is one of the most adorable of the heroines—not too easy, perhaps, to live with, but fascinating to read about. It is astonishing how Jane Austen, herself at the time of writing a very young woman, has succeeded in presenting with such power and sympathy the flaming spirit of youth. It is seldom that the very young write attractively or convincingly about the very young. Elinor is much more a young person's heroine than Marianne. But the presentation of Marianne never falters and never loses either its youthfulness or its enchantment. Her very self-absorption is part of her charm, and with the much later Emma she shares the distinction of being "faultless in spite of her faults"; I could almost say because of them.

The book also contains some unforgettable scenes—one or two that, almost alone in the Jane Austen novels, are really poignant—such as Marianne's encounter with Willoughby at the party and the scene between her and Elinor in the bedroom, when her sister "saw Marianne stretched on the bed, almost choked by grief, one letter in her hand, and two or three others lying by her. Elinor drew near, but without saying a word, and seating herself on the bed, took her hand, kissed her affectionately several times, and then gave way to a burst of tears, which at first was scarcely less violent than Marianne's." The sisterly devotion of Elinor and Marianne is to me more moving than that of Jane and Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice*—simply, perhaps, because it has a tragic, as distinct from a gay (if occasionally wistful) expression.

Family affection is a fruitful theme in all the novels, and any lack of it is regarded as one of the greatest miseries. We are shown the reverse side of the medal in *Sense and Sensibility*, but it is treated mainly in a comic spirit. There can be few more ripely delicious scenes than the dialogue between John Dashwood and his wife on the subject of exactly how little they can do for his mother and sisters. I have a liking, too, for that strange harangue on cottages delivered by Robert Ferrars to Elinor, who "agreed with all, for she did not think he deserved the compliment of rational opposition".

My assessment of this novel as the best of the three early ones has wavered only while reading *Northanger Abbey*. I am always captivated by the neatness and limpidity of this book, in contrast to the occasional shapelessness and obscurity of *Sense and Sensibility*. Also Catherine Morland is in her different way as charmingly youthful as Marianne—and much more remarkable as the creation of a writer only a little older than herself. For she is the true, typical *ingénue* and it seems impossible that an *ingénue* should be consciously presented by another *ingénue*. The ardours and exaggerations of Marianne's character are more within the scope of youthful observation than the simplicity and innocence of Catherine's.

Certainly the novel—which had been written twenty years earlier under the title of *Susan*—must have been revised before its publication in 1818. We must also remember that in 1798 a girl of twenty-two was very much the same as a girl of twenty-seven in 1943. I think we can add at least five years to the ages of all the Jane Austen heroines (the same goes, of course, for the author) in order to bring them into comparison with the modern girl. When in *Sense and Sensibility* Mrs. Jennings, after explaining Miss Williams as a near relation of Colonel Brandon's, goes on to say: "We will not say how near, for fear of shocking the young ladies," then adds in a lower voice to Elinor, "she is his natural daughter", I am always amused to think that Elinor, chosen out as sufficiently mature for this confidence, is herself only nineteen. I imagine that Jane Austen was always, even at Catherine's age or Marianne's, very much more like Elinor than she was like the younger girls—Elinor with a piquant sauce of Elizabeth Bennet.

*Northanger Abbey* is technically the most "perfect" of the early novels and has the advantage of a satirical undertone. One does not need to have read Mrs. Radcliffe's thrillers to be able to appreciate the delicious fun that is poked at them here. The plot—though running parallel all the time with the artificialities of a Gothic novel—is, except for the episode of General Tilney's wrath and Eleanor's submission, much more natural and less "contrived" than in either *Sense and Sensi-*

bility or *Pride and Prejudice*. Again I suspect revision and a smoothing out of crudities, for the observation whether of men or things is nearly always that of an experienced mind.

But the chief charm of *Northanger Abbey*, as indeed in all the three early novels, lies in the heroine—Catherine Morland, as fresh and crisp and sweet as that very hyacinth she tells Henry Tilney she has just learned to love. I have already said that when I read about her I waver in my preference of Marianne. For Catherine has strength as well as sweetness, sense as well as enthusiasm. She was also an unselfish, humble, well-behaved little girl, and in taking her to Bath Mrs. Allen certainly had a better bargain than Mrs. Jennings when she took Marianne to London. Yes, undoubtedly, if the test of a heroine is one's desire to have her company in real life, the award goes to Catherine and not to Marianne. But I am not altogether sure that this is a fair test in fiction. It would rule out a number of girls one delights to read about.

Another very different character is drawn with as masterly a touch. I mean John Thorpe, who, indeed is almost too well drawn, for his effect on the reader is nearly as deadly as if one had met him personally. I share with Catherine the inexpressible boredom of those drives when "unfixed as were her general notions of what men ought to be, she could not entirely repress a doubt, while she bore with the effusions of his endless conceit, of his being altogether completely agreeable".

As for Isabella Thorpe, who shall adequately suggest the flavour of that friendship between the two fair ones? Every heroine in white satin and confidante in white muslin is mocked in it, and yet it has the simple everyday silliness of a schoolgirl "pash". Isabella herself is a masterpiece, as well done as her brother. As for the hero, Henry Tilney, he stands highest in my estimation of the first three heroes—of all the heroes, in fact, except Mr. Knightley. He is infinitely more human than Darcy and more lively (though this would not be difficult) than Colonel Brandon; though a clergyman he is not a prig like Edmund Bertram, and he is more fully realised and rounded off than Captain Wentworth, who sometimes partakes—at least to my mind—of Darcy's fairy prince quality.

There are certainly fewer crudities in *Northanger Abbey* than in *Sense and Sensibility*, and my reason for giving the latter a higher place is the same as that for which most Janeites prefer *Persuasion* to the more technically perfect *Emma*. It sounds depths which the neater, lighter novel does not reach. It has the gift of tears. We hear the voice of the water-pipes singing in the storm, yet over the surface the sunshine plays as gaily as on any gravel walk at Hartfield or at Pemberley. Without

those-tears in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Persuasion*, I think we should find the literary ground occasionally a little dry.

There is a gap of many years between these two novels which have the gift of tears. One is her first and crudest, the other is her last and most mature. In the interval she wrote those four which are played throughout in a major key. She also lived several years without writing at all. We shall never know the circumstances which made her pen inactive. It may have been the mysterious love-affair which all biographers love to hint at, or it may equally have been the wrench and break of leaving Steventon, where she had been born and had lived throughout her youth and early womanhood ; or it may be even that the youthful genius which had expressed itself in *Elinor and Marianne*, *Susan* and *First Impressions* lacked the self-confidence to break entirely new ground.

*Mansfield Park* was not begun till *Sense and Sensibility* had been published, or at least was due for publication. One can imagine the author gaining confidence from her success with the earlier book and starting a work without the need of support from a younger Jane Austen. For *Mansfield Park* is the first of her novels to be written straight off, as it were. *Sense and Sensibility* had been *Elinor and Marianne* ; *Pride and Prejudice* had been *First Impressions* ; *Northanger Abbey* had been *Susan*. All these three novels are in essence very much younger than their final and public shapes. So the change in outlook and in temperament between them and *Mansfield Park* has more to account for it than the years between 1811 and 1816.

In comparison with the novels written at Steventon, *Mansfield Park* is serious and sedate. In it we see Jane Austen as middle-aged—older for some reason than in the later *Emma*. I have already conjectured as to the reasons for certain aspects of this change and its limitation to *Mansfield Park*. The book is curiously solemn—for Jane Austen ; even its more light-hearted moments carry a hint of tragedy and more than a hint of censure. The Crawfords must be disapproved of, and Aunt Norris is condemned to a punishment unshared, though not undeserved, by Mrs. Elton and Lady Catherine de Bourgh.

In spite of this *Mansfield Park* is very dear to me. - It is certainly a better book than any of the earlier novels—though less superficially attractive ; it is wiser, deeper, truer, richer. Its greater length has not led to either impoverishment or padding. Its observation of life and character is unfailing, though one may not always agree with the conclusions drawn from it. It contains some of my best-beloved episodes—the visit to Sotherton, the rehearsal for *Lovers' Vows*, as well as many pleasant dinner visits and at least one ball. One has to the full that sense

of being in good company, taking part in the engagements of a very pleasant society. The book also is full of unforgettable people—Aunt Norris, Lady Bertram, Sir Thomas, the Crawfords . . . indeed all the characters are drawn with firmness and vitality. There are no failures, though one may not share the author's likes and dislikes—indeed, one doesn't.

I am more favourably inclined to Fanny than many readers, though even to me it seems strange that Jane Austen liked her best of all her heroines. One has to be continually reminding oneself that her upbringing at Mansfield was of the very kind most calculated to foster an inferiority complex; otherwise her extreme diffidence and humility might strike a hypocritical note. But I find her entirely sincere—in contrast with the so much more attractive Mary Crawford—and I cannot help liking her for her warm feelings and loyal heart. She is occasionally priggish in her moralisings, but never to the same extent as Edmund; for she is never superior. Note her behaviour when Sir Thomas's unexpected return breaks up the rehearsals of *Lovers' Vows*. She can take no comfort in her own innocence, and certainly no pride in the fact that she is the only member of the family who has done nothing he could possibly disapprove of. She agonizes over the others, feeling as guilty as any one of them. That is not the attitude of a hard-boiled prig.

I am also engaged by her genuine humility—so gratefully responsive to the favour of a fire in her sitting-room—and by her devoted helpfulness to Aunt Bertram and to others. G. B. Stern is annoyed with her because she does not mend the carpet in her mother's house, but it seems more than likely that carpet-mending was not among the accomplishments taught her at Mansfield Park. I'm sure that Sir Thomas's carpets were never in holes. That she was willing to help in any way that she was able is proved by her humble co-operation in the making of Sam's shirts. "Fanny was very anxious to be useful and not to appear above her home, or in any way disqualified or disinclined by her foreign education, from contributing her help to its comforts, and therefore set about working for Sam immediately; and by working early and late, with perseverance and great despatch, did so much that the boy was shipped off at last, with more than half his linen ready. She had great pleasure in feeling her usefulness, but could not conceive how they would have managed without her."

This is scarcely the picture of a girl too supine and self-centred to help a struggling housewife. Carpets, on the other hand, cannot be sewn together like shirts, and I do not think Fanny can be blamed for lacking the ability to do a job that requires a special skill.

As for her withdrawing with Susan to their bedroom for reading and sewing and talking, away from the rest of the family, this seems to me the only practical solution of the problem she had to face. Susan had already proved the uselessness of any direct attack on her mother's "slow bustle". So Fanny was wise to withdraw from it and, while making herself as useful as she could without actual interference—we know that she ran errands at Portsmouth as well as at Mansfield—concentrate on her sister as the most worth-while member of the family and the only one she could really help and truly love. The library subscription taken out for Susan's benefit, as well as the thoughtful and kindly episode of Betsey's knife, show her to be both good-natured and imaginatively kind.

No, I cannot let G. B. Stern be so very like Aunt Norris about poor Fanny. I certainly do not rate her as high as her creator—not as high as the other heroines. But I think she was, in Lady Middleton's language, a very agreeable girl indeed, even though not, in Sir John's, the sweetest girl in the world. The only time I really lose patience with her is when she still refuses to believe in the seriousness of Crawford's intentions, even after he has made a formal proposal for her hand. Her letter to Mary Crawford, though touching in its childlike bewilderment, is really stupid. I am indeed a little out of patience with her during the whole Crawford episode. He is so infinitely preferable to Edmund. One has to remind oneself that the latter is involved deeply with her conservative nature in memories of early kindness in order to sympathize at all with her devotion to this incredibly dull prig. I like Edmund all the less for falling in love with Mary Crawford, for whom I have all Fanny's distrust if not quite all her disapproval.

Henry Crawford I like very much better than his author would allow. His faults are all superficial, and would have probably disappeared on his marriage to a girl like Fanny. But I cannot agree with G. B. Stern in thinking that Jane Austen ever intended to end the story that way. Apart from the fact that the novel is not impulsively written and gives no sign of the author having changed her mind at any point in its construction, such an ending would have created more problems than it could solve. It would, presumably, have involved the marriage of Mary and Edmund, and we know that Jane liked Edmund—though not, I think, quite blindly—and disliked Miss Crawford. Such marriages may be made in modern fiction, but not in the fiction of 1806. Unless she had deliberately created Edmund in the spirit of Wickham or Willoughby, and designed a retributively unhappy marriage for him, she would never have let him pair with a woman so very likely to make him miserable. For I do not think that Mary would have improved



on marriage like her brother. Her faults are fundamental and very treacherous. She would have made Edmund's life a burden ; so, as he is obviously the hero of the book, the formulas of novel-construction, which were mathematically observed in Jane Austen's day, would not have allowed him to marry her. Q.E.D.

As for Henry, I do not think that the softening of Fanny's heart towards him is meant to do more than emphasize the moral of the tale. "Henry Crawford, ruined by early independence and bad domestic example, indulged in the freaks of a cold-blooded vanity a little too long . . . Could he have found sufficient exultation in . . . working himself into the esteem and tenderness of Fanny Price, there would have been every probability of success and felicity for him. His affection had already done something. . . . Would he have deserved more there can be no doubt that more would have been obtained. . . . Would he have persevered, and uprightly, Fanny must have been his reward." Now all this would have been lost had Fanny remained adamant, and there might have been some justification of Aunt Norris's estimation of her as the "demon of the piece". Also Crawford's aberration with Maria would have been more excusable.

It would also have been more probable ; and it is a fault of the novel that credulity is strained by this culminating episode. It is difficult to believe that Crawford, now aware of a relenting of Fanny towards him, should have deliberately wrecked his chances by compromising himself with a woman for whom he had not the slightest affection. His vanity could not, in spite of his author's statement, have been the motive power, for that surely had been served by that very coldness in Maria which he had set out to overcome. Had he found her easy and friendly after her marriage to Rushworth, his vanity might have smarted ; but her aloofness, her obviously enduring resentment, spoke of a surviving regard which could only have flattered him. No, Miss Austen, it was not vanity ; it was passion—which can make the impossible happen and a sensible man act like a fool. Had you made Henry Crawford fall for Maria Rushworth in a moment of unreasoning passion and then find himself suddenly blackmailed and entangled. . . . But "let other pens . . ." I know ; and since we are thankful that no other pen wrote this story, let it be.

✓ Emma after Mansfield Park is like a sunny morning after a day, not rainy, but overcast by soft grey skies. The air is warm and clear, the birds are singing, the threatened storm has blown away. The people we meet seldom moralize, and then only in a rational, excusable manner. There is plenty of fun—and a great deal of lively, pleasant company at which we are never asked to shake a finger. Compare Jane Austen's

treatment of Frank Churchill with her treatment of Henry Crawford. The former is just as selfish, just as irresponsible, just as reprehensibly charming as the latter, but his maker views him with a tolerance that involves no sacrifice of truth, and allows him to be happy, even happier than he deserves. Emma is a delightfully human and fallible heroine, and as lively as Fanny is creep-mouse. The hero, though no one could be a higher example of rectitude than Mr. Knightley, is no prig, and there are no demons in the piece at all, just ordinary human beings, some good, some bad, some attractive, some very much the reverse, and none of them actually seen from the pulpit.

Emma is my favourite among the novels, another position which I shall have to justify, as I think most Jane-lovers prefer *Persuasion*. They prefer it for its depth of feeling, its tenderness, its suggestion of true love in contrast to the more conventionally romantic love-affairs of the other novels, its atmosphere of tenderness, of autumn, of decline. It also has the heroine whom the majority of Jane-lovers find most captivating, and certainly Anne Elliot is a very much more amiable and indeed estimable woman than Emma Woodhouse, who was often bumptious and cocksure of herself, as well as being an outrageous snob. There is no question, I think, as to whom we should prefer to meet in real life. Perhaps I am exceptional in taking the heroine of a novel as I find her in the book and not considering her as a member of my own household.

Jane Austen in her letters speaks of finding her own Anne Elliot "too good for her", and though I cannot see that she is too good for anybody—certainly not nearly so much too good as Jane's better-loved Fanny Price—I find her sometimes a little too solemn. G. B. Stern endows her with a sense of humour on the strength of her finding "some amusement at" Admiral and Mrs. Croft's "style of driving, which she imagined no bad representation of the general guidance of their affairs", but this seems to me a very feeble swallow of which to make a summer, and we have no other hint—at least that I can discern. She certainly had not Elizabeth Bennet's gift of being able to laugh at herself, nor Emma's confident, cheerful outlook on her restricted world. Of course, unlike Emma and Elizabeth in any real sense, she had suffered, but suffering is no foe to humour or even to gaiety, except sometimes in its immediate neighbourhood. I should like Anne better if she laughed more. But she laughs no oftener than Lady Russell, whose solemn influence had doubtless affected the development of her character as it had affected the course of her life.

I have given my reasons for thinking that Lady Russell is Jane Austen's most notable failure, and as she is an important character with an

important part to play, her lack of living actuality affects the whole book. In *Emma* there are no failures of this kind—indeed the characters are the most surely drawn of all Jane Austen's men and women. The book contains, in my opinion, a finer portrait gallery than any other of the novels—Mr. Woodhouse, that most lovable of hypochondriacs, Harriet Smith, that most lovable of fools, and Emma herself, that most lovable of opinionated, wrong-headed young women. Then there is Mr. Knightley, most lovable, I think, of the heroes, as well as the most life-like and most man-like, and the very one I should have chosen myself to marry. There is Mrs. Weston, admirably realised in her unselfish kindness and intelligence ; and few characters in fiction are more entertaining—to read of at least—than Miss Bates. The elegance, aloofness, and misfortune of Jane Fairfax stand out in contrast both with her aunt's garrulously humble home and with the more fortunate, less gifted Emma Woodhouse. It is clever of the author never to let us see her direct, as it were, but only in the very different estimations of Emma and Miss Bates ; for her own reserve is allowed to come between her and the reader just as it came between her and those she met in life, and she remains a character we never quite get, as we were never meant, to know.

Frank Churchill is a sympathetic study of a charming playboy, spoilt, in contrast to Henry Crawford in *Mansfield Park*, as much by the repressions of his upbringing as by its indulgences. The possessiveness of Mrs. Churchill is at the bottom of all the trouble of his secret engagement to Jane Fairfax, and though Jane Austen never allows us to feel, any more than he felt himself, that he is worthy of the lady of his choice, neither does she allow herself to moralize over him. Mr. Weston, Isabella and John Knightley, and the detestable Eltons, are all characters admirably sustaining smaller parts, while a chorus made up of Mrs. Goddard and her teachers, the Coles, the Martins of Abbey Mill Farm, Mrs. Ford of Ford's shop, Mrs. Bates, Patty and Mr. Perry, fills up the drama of village life to its richest content. Jane Austen's own specially created world was never more self-contained, more alive, more interesting, more entertaining than in *Emma*.

The story and construction, too, of the novel are nearly perfect, and the "plot", depending more on the reactions and interplay of character than on its own surprises, is a century ahead of the usual mechanisms of the period. Nor are we ever faced with the contrivances and improbabilities that occasionally spoil her invention in the other novels.

As a novel, I maintain, *Emma* is technically superb—better than *Persuasion*, where there are *longueurs* and clumsinesses. In *Persuasion* we

have a slow beginning and a notable absence of dialogue, which is depriving us of one of the author's best gifts. Later on there is the common but always clumsy eighteenth-century device of a story within a story, when Mrs. Smith tells the tale of her ill-usage by Mr. Elliot—a technique which Jane herself laughs at in *Northanger Abbey*, when on introducing Mrs. Thorpe with a few crisp words she adds: "this brief account of the family is intended to supersede the necessity of a long and minute detail from Mrs. Thorpe herself, of her past adventures and sufferings."

These are not serious defects, and how true, how inerrant was Jane Austen's instinct as a writer is proved by her substitution of Captain Wentworth's proposal by letter at the White Hart, with the scenes following, for the much less moving second proposal at Admiral Croft's house which she discarded. Also she more than balances her failure with Lady Russell by her portraits of Mrs. Smith, the Musgroves, the Crofts and the little naval group at Lyme. The book also has an attractive and inspiring hero, nearly as much a fairy prince as Darcy but lacking Darcy's woodenness. As for the heroine, I think that she is the favourite of the vast majority of true Janeites, and to meet—as distinct from to read about—I should greatly prefer her to Emma. Gentle, sorrowful, sweet Anne in her "desolate tranquility" is by far the most poetic character in all the novels, and her happy fate at the end has none of the conventional "happy ending" about it, but is rather in the nature of the felicitous last line of a lyric. It is Anne and this note of deep, poetic feeling which give the novel its pre-eminence, so that I have to find my reasons for preferring *Emma* in myself rather than in the book.

The main reason is a personal addiction to scenes and places rather than to people, and in this *Emma* is unquestionably the richer novel or the two. It is true that (in *Persuasion* we have the unforgettable scene at Lyme, which was to Tennyson (as it is to most Janeites) so much more important than anything (I had almost said anything else) in the town's history. We have too the little gathering at the White Hart, with that intensely moving conversation between Anne and Captain Harville, the conversation which made clear to Captain Wentworth the state of her heart; and we have the concert in the Octagon Room, with its delicate approaches, and that lovely, misty, gentle autumn day on which Anne went out walking with Captain Wentworth and the Musgroves and sat silently and sadly listening to him and Louisa talking together while they tried for a gleanings of nuts in the hedgerow. What, again, more dramatically simple than the first sudden meeting between Anne and Wentworth after their eight years' estrangement?—"A bow,

a curtsy passed ; she heard his voice ; he talked to Mary, said all that was right, said something to the Miss Musgroves—enough to mark an easy footing ; the room seemed full—full of persons and voices—but a few minutes ended it.”

As against this *Emma*, much the longer novel of the two, involves me continuously in the social life of Highbury. No episode is pitched to the emotional heights of these scenes in *Persuasion*, but once more I am involved with a personal preference for having my mind entertained rather than my heart moved in fiction. I own that it is a personal preference and a form of escapism, but I deal here with an is-ness rather than an ought-ness, so make no effort to defend myself against those who regard the escapes of the mind with a disfavour they would not extend to the escapes of the body.

I read Jane Austen for a holiday—a “ holiday of spirits ”—and her main enchantment (for me) is the world, the life, she offers me—like enough to my own to be real, unlike enough to be stimulating—rather than the people she invites me to meet.

When Johnson went over Jordan in Mr. Priestley’s play he met at the Inn at the End of the World none other than Mr. Pickwick, his best-known and best-loved character in fiction. When I go over Jordan, if I should ever be offered the hospitality of that inn on the frontiers of life and death, I should not ask to meet even Anne Elliot, even Elizabeth Bennet. No single character in the novels would give me the same thrill as being allowed to step into a scene from one of them.

The scene I should choose, among many competitors, would be the dinner-party Emma gave for Mrs. Elton. Why should I want to meet Mrs. Elton ? you exclaim. If I want a dinner visit in Highbury, I can dine with the Coles, or join the party that assembled at Randalls on Christmas Eve, both memorable occasions. The point is, however, that I want to be at Hartfield, to see the house and know what sort of a dinner Emma gave her company. At the Coles’s I should not meet Mr. Woodhouse, and at Randalls I should have to watch his misery when he hears his son-in-law’s callous announcement of the snowstorm—“ this will prove a spirited beginning of your winter engagements, Sir. Something new for your coachman and horses to be making their way through a storm of snow.”

No, I could not bear to see his consternation nor watch the early break-up of the party, even under the improved conditions that followed Mr. Knightley’s more temperate statement of the weather. I prefer to see him at ease in his own house, “ making the circle of his guests, and paying his particular compliments to the ladies ”. As for

Mrs. Elton, I should be vastly entertained to observe her, since I should not have the irritation of attempting to converse with her—for I make it clear that I attend this function as a disembodied spirit ; it would be entirely spoilt for me if I had to take part in it as an anachronistic guest—besides, it would upset Mr. Woodhouse's numbers and spoil the lucky chance that took Mr. Weston away to London.

The greatest drawback would be that I should not meet Harriet Smith, for we know that on this occasion she begged to be allowed to stay at home. "She would rather not be in *his* company more than she could help. She was not quite able to see him and his charming, happy wife together without feeling uncomfortable." Nor should I meet Frank Churchill, but that would not disturb me very much. I should see Jane Fairfax but not Miss Bates—I could have met Miss Bates at the Coles's. The point is, however, that I am not so anxious to meet people as to watch scenes and visit places, and the scene of this dinner-party at Hartfield has for me attractions that no other company could offer in any other house.

How happily I would watch them all assemble in the drawing-room for that interval between arrival and dinner which in those days there was nothing but conversation to fill. I would note what the ladies—and gentlemen, too—were wearing, and decide if Mrs. Elton's gown was really too fine, as I suspect it was, in spite of her horror of being over-trimmed. I should be interested to see Jane Fairfax and listen to her conversation with Mr. John Knightley about the post-office—"The post office is a wonderful establishment !" said she, "the regularity and despatch of it ! If one thinks of all it has to do, and all that it does so well, it is really astonishing !" Then, of course, I should follow Mr. Woodhouse round and listen to all his polite speeches, as he "made every fair lady welcome and easy" ; and finally I should follow Emma and Jane Fairfax in to dinner as "they followed the other ladies out of the room, arm in arm, with an appearance of goodwill highly becoming to the beauty and grace of each".

Jane Austen dismisses the dinner itself very summarily. By the next chapter, the ladies are already back in the drawing-room. So I should find this part of the entertainment specially interesting, as it would be all of it new to me. The food they ate, the things they said—they would all be, because fresh and unknown, more absorbing than the after-dinner conversation which I knew already, even than that supreme dialogue between Mrs. Elton and Mr. Weston, wherein he is determined to talk about his son and she is determined to talk about herself. I should also have the pleasure of lingering on and watching the dispersal of the company, which is not described in the book—of hearing their

farewells as they dispersed in their carriages, the Eltons no doubt conveying Jane.

So, if it should ever happen that I should reach that inn and have a favour similar to Mr. Johnson's extended to me, like poor Anne Steele I shall have my answer ready.

